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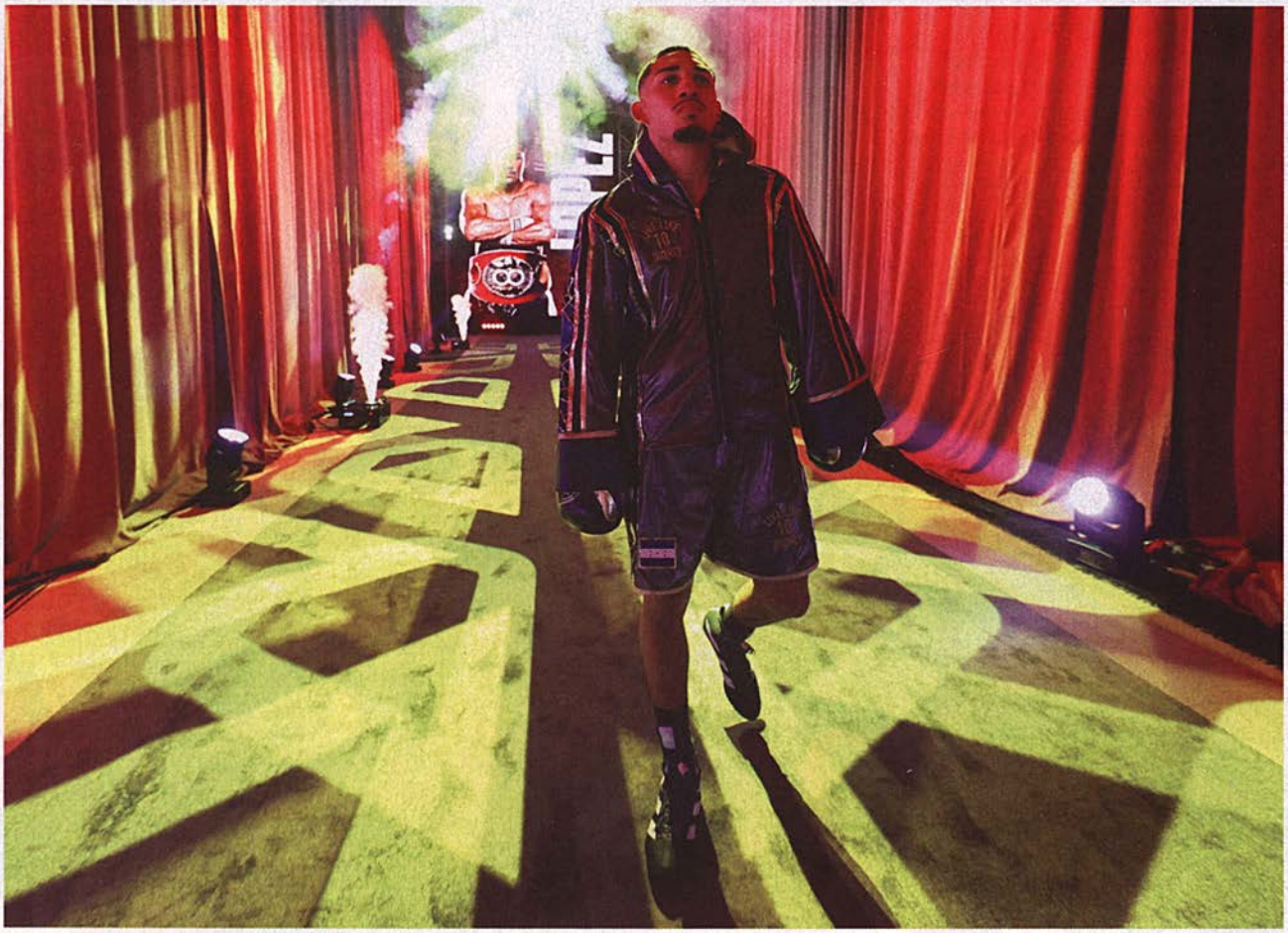

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Many experts said that Teofimo Lopez was untested, but he provided the ultimate mic drop by dethroning Vasiliy Lomachenko.

COVER PHOTO BY MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC

OPENING SHOT

Ring Magazine bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue was back to his malicious best in posting a dominant seventh-round knockout over Jason Moloney at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC

THE MATRIX HAS BEEN HACKED

In the wake of the two Olympic gold medals and 396-1 amateur record, I understand why Bob Arum acquiesced to Vasiliy Lomachenko's demands for an immediate title fight. But there is no shortcut in boxing; fighters hone their skills and perfect their craft over four, six, eight, 10 and then 12 rounds for a reason. Exhibit A. Jeff Fenech: won his first world title in his seventh fight, was a three-division champ by fight 20 but then got stopped by Azumah Nelson eight fights later and went 3-2 for the rest of his career. Exhibit B. Michael Olajide Jr.: was rushed into 12-rounders in his fifth fight by his vicariously domineering father/trainer/manager, never developed properly as a pro and lost his two world title attempts. Lomachenko is now 14-2, there are two blueprints to beat him and the mystique is gone; by this time next year he will be an opponent.

Bradley Morris
Astoria, N.Y.

Hard times for Loma!

THE FIRST CENTURY

I was looking at my latest issue of The Ring recently, and it came to my mind that the magazine was now 98 years old, nearing its 100th year birthday. I started to think about my history as a fan of The Ring. I purchased my first issue in 1973. What got my attention was the cover, which featured George Foreman stopping Joe Frazier for the world heavyweight title in Kingston, Jamaica. I was a huge Joe Frazier fan, and I saw the fight on Wide World of Sports. I remember the great Howard Cosell yelling the now-famous line, "Down goes Frazier! Down goes Frazier! Down goes Frazier!" I read my first issue of The Ring and I became a lifelong subscriber. The Ring became my favorite magazine, replacing wrestling magazines and comic books. As my love for the sport of boxing grew, so did my thirst for boxing knowledge. The Ring showed me that there was more to the sport than the heavyweights. I read about fighters who we didn't get to see on American television – Jose Napoles, Carlos Monzon, John Conteh and many others. I have been a fan of The Ring Magazine for over 47 years. I was a fan during its heyday and when they temporarily closed its doors, and I was there for its current rebirth. As The Ring nears its 100th birthday, I hope that there will be a great celebration for the many years of service that The Ring Magazine has given fans all over the world.

Ernie Brown
Corner Man

GO TIGER

The mythical matchup by Ron Lipton with Dick Tiger fighting Saul "Canelo" Alvarez in the December 2020 issue was one of the most exciting articles I have ever read in The Ring. I used to see Tiger fight live on TV and in the Garden when I lived in Queens, New York, before I moved to California; he was one of my favorite fighters and I saved all my Ring Magazines that had writeups on him.

I could not put the article down once I started reading it. I wanted to take a peek at the ending, but I read it through and it was great. Dick Tiger was one of my favorite fighters of yesteryear and Canelo Alvarez is definitely my favorite fighter today. I agree with Tiger as the winner, but I think he would have stopped Canelo in the fight.

I saw Mr. Lipton referee many times, and he is one of the best referees out there, but now he is one of my favorite boxing writers. Great job, Ron. You have a unique talent. Amazing stuff. I can't wait for the next one. Did you do any other mythical matchups for The Ring that I missed?

Arnie Rifkin
Los Angeles

EDITOR'S NOTE: You can also read Mr. Lipton's Rocky Graziano vs. Rubin "Hurricane" Carter mythical matchup in the May 2020 issue. It's another barnburner.

FOREVER YOUNG

I eagerly opened the January 2021 issue of The Ring and was excited when I saw a picture of ... I couldn't believe it ... my favorite heavyweight contender from the '70s, Jimmy Young!

I thought, "How cool? A picture of my fav placed in an article about George Foreman." My jaw almost hit the floor when I realized the article was actually about Young and not Ali, Foreman, Norton or any of the other great fighters of that golden era of heavyweights.

I was too young (I was born in '64) to understand or appreciate what made Muhammad Ali great. I was only a kid, and so Ali was simply a "mean, rude, arrogant bully" to my 10-year-old psyche. In May of '75, my parents were shopping for furniture at a Levitz, and so I plopped myself down on a couch to watch the Ali-Young fight ... I think it was on Wide World of Sports.

I was ecstatic when the fight ended, certain that the champ had been dethroned. Of course, I experienced the first (but not last) taste of what it feels like when you think your fighter got "robbed."

Long story short, Young became my guy. I was jubilant when he beat Foreman, inconsolable when he dropped the split decision to Norton ... hell, I even remember crying when he got stopped on cuts well past his prime against an up-and-coming Gerry Cooney.

Thank you for remembering him. I think he earned a spot at the table with the greats from that era. It was really nice to see Foreman and Holmes speak so kindly of him. Articles like these are what makes The Ring so special. Thanks again.

Darren Paulson
Vacaville, Calif.

CORRECTION: In the "Jabs and Straight Writes" column for the January 2021 issue, the title of Mark Kriegel's novel is listed as both Bless Me, Father *and* Forgive Me, Father. *The correct title is* Bless Me, Father.

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com
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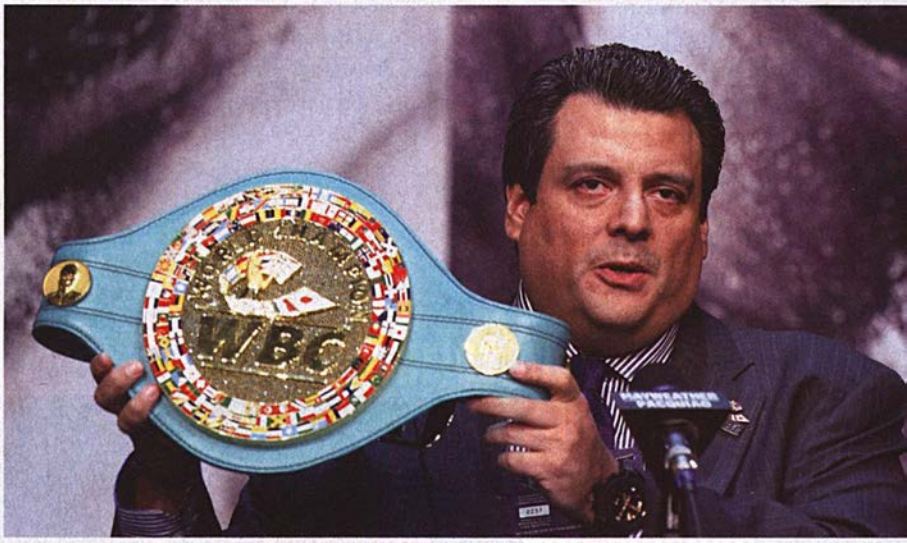
RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

MIS-MANDATORIES ARE WORSE THAN BOGUS WEIGHT CLASSES



Another division and another bunch of belts are coming your way when the WBC's bridgerweight becomes a reality.

Of the four major sanctioning organizations, the World Boxing Council is the undisputed champion of marketing and publicity. None of the others – the WBA, IBF and WBO – come close to the Mexico City-based organization's media savvy.

I'm not pointing this out to toss shade on the WBC. I respect their game. The Ring could learn a thing or two by the way they promote their brand. And to be fair, some of the publicity the WBC garners is for the right reasons, such as their efforts to improve fighter safety and PED-testing protocols through their Clean Boxing Program.

But who knew the WBC was pound-for-pound level at trolling?

WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman damn near broke Boxing Twitter in November when he announced that his organization would soon recognize a new weight class to be called bridgerweight, which would serve as a "bridge" between the cruiserweight and heavyweight divisions.

To say that boxing's social media community was triggered by Sulaiman's desire to offer heavyweights weighing between 200-224 pounds a "safe space" with his new division (named after Bridger Walker, the 6-year-old boy who suffered severe facial wounds defending his 4-year-old sister from a dog attack) is an understatement. Hardcore fans were sent into a frenzy of Twitter tirades directed at El Presidente.

Several fans asked me (via Twitter) if I or The Ring would recognize bridgerweight. My answer was no, which was a big relief to most of them. (I should have said "yes" just to witness them lose their shit and accuse me of being in Sulaiman's pocket, but my troll game isn't that tight.)

However, I found it strange that some of the same hardcore heads attacking the WBC over bridgerweight refused to recognize Teofimo Lopez as the undisputed lightweight champion because Devin Haney holds the WBC 135-pound title. So, they recognize who the WBC says is the "champion" but now say the organization has lost its credibility. OK.

Never mind that the WBC created the split-title situation by elevating Vasiliy Lomachenko to WBC

"franchise champion" status and awarding Haney the regular title prior to the Ukrainian's defense against Lopez. (To Lopez's credit, he let the world know via his Instagram that the Ring Magazine title he won from Lomachenko validates his position as an elite boxer and the real champion of the world.)

But everyone claims to be mad about bridgerweight. If Aleksandr Usyk, who weighs around 215 as a heavyweight, decided to face Deontay Wilder, who weighed between 212 and 223 for the six bouts preceding his career-high weight of 231 for the Tyson Fury rematch, for the inaugural bridgerweight title, do you think those same fans would boycott the fight?

If they say they would, they're lying. They'd watch with interest because it's a compelling matchup between seasoned veterans. That's all boxing is about at the end of the day – the best fights, not title belts or weight classes.

The only time I get pissed off at the sanctioning organizations is when they prevent the best from facing the best. This usually happens when titleholders want to engage in unification bouts but first have to defend against a sanctioning organization's mandatory challenger or risk getting stripped of the belt.

Fury vs. Anthony Joshua is the biggest fight that can be made in boxing (it's why we put the British stars on the cover of the December 2020 issue). When Fury declared the clause for his immediate third bout with Wilder had expired, fans salivated over the prospect of the Ring/WBC champ clashing with the IBF/WBA/WBO unified titleholder for the undisputed heavyweight championship in 2021.

But we've got to wait and see what happens with Joshua vs. his IBF mandatory, Kubrat Pulev, on December 12. And then we might have to wait for Joshua to get past his WBO mandatory, Usyk. No disrespect to Pulev or to the former undisputed cruiserweight champ, but neither has done anything to merit a mandatory shot at Joshua.

As soon as this issue's cover star defeated Lomachenko, fans around the globe started fantasizing about high-profile showdowns with Gervonta Davis and Ryan Garcia. But the reality is that if Lopez, who's looking to move to 140 pounds soon, remains at lightweight for another fight, he won't be facing a fellow U.S. attraction; his first title defense will be vs. IBF mandatory George Kambosos Jr.

Estrada-Sor Rungvisai 3 could happen instead of Estrada-Gonzalez 2.

I don't have anything against the rugged Australian, who entered The Ring's lightweight rankings at No. 9 following his IBF title-elimination bout with Lee Selby, which he won by split decision. But Lopez-Kambosos is not a matchup fans are clamoring for. It can be a big event in Australia, but casual fans watching the fight on ESPN are gonna ask, "Why's the champ fighting this dude?"

That's a question hardcore fans often ask.

Why did junior welterweight champ Josh Taylor's first defense of his Ring, WBA and IBF titles have to be against Apinun Khongsong?

Why does Gennadiy Golovkin's next fight have to be against Kamil Szeremeta?

Why was Artur Beterbiev scheduled to defend his WBC and IBF light heavyweight titles against Meng Fanlong, and now Adam Deines?

Why are we talking about a third bout between Juan Francisco Estrada and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai when the junior bantamweight showdown that everybody wants is the Estrada-Roman Gonzalez rematch?

The answer to each question, of course, is sanctioning-body mandatories (or "mis-mandatories" as my old cohort Steve Kim used to call them).

I'm not mad about the mandatory challengers getting their title shots (Sor Rungvisai is certainly worthy), but I feel for the defending champs who have earned the right to fight who they want, and I'm frustrated that fans have to continually wait for captivating matchups.

Golovkin turns 39 in April. Does he have time for the Szeremetas of the middleweight division? Beterbiev turns 36 on January 21. He should be fighting fellow titleholder Dmitry Bivol for the vacant Ring Magazine championship, not the painfully ordinary Fanlong or Deines.

Estrada and Gonzalez have been in a lot of wars since their epic first fight. Don't they deserve to make the most money they can with the highest-profile matchup while they still have some fight left in their little bodies? Yes, they do, and that happens with their rematch – NOW, not later.

The business of boxing blocks enough superfights on its own with promoter-broadcast partner exclusivity. It doesn't need help from the sanctioning organizations.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/GETTY IMAGES

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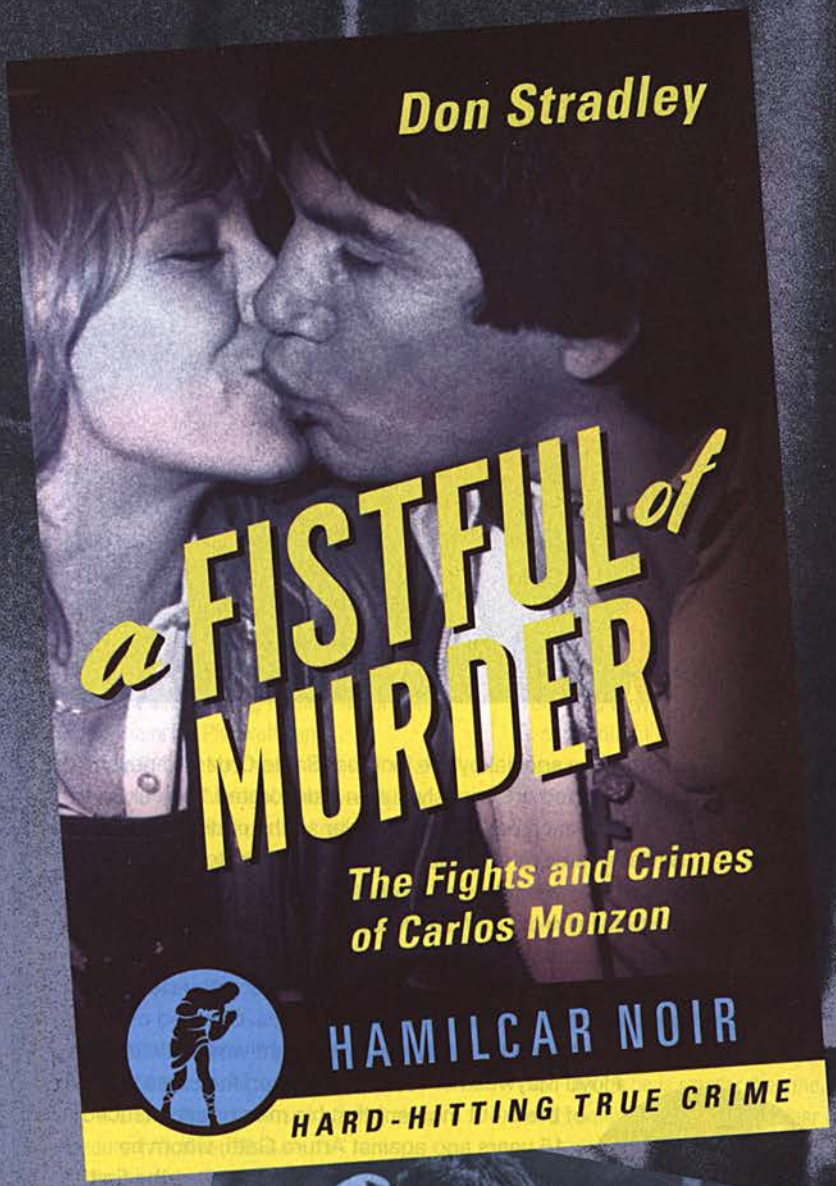

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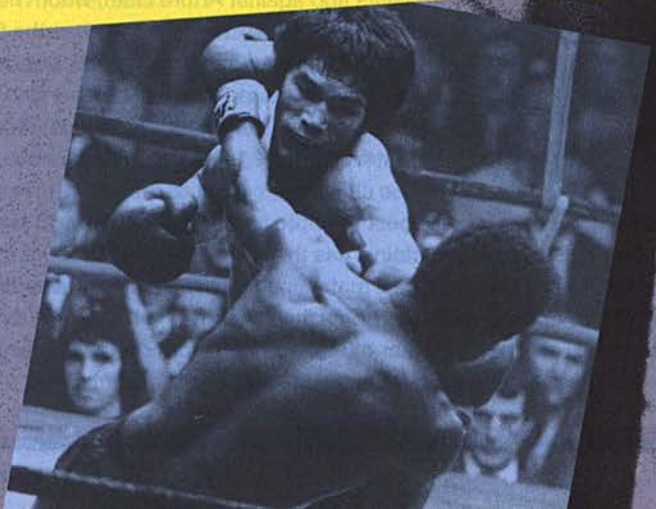

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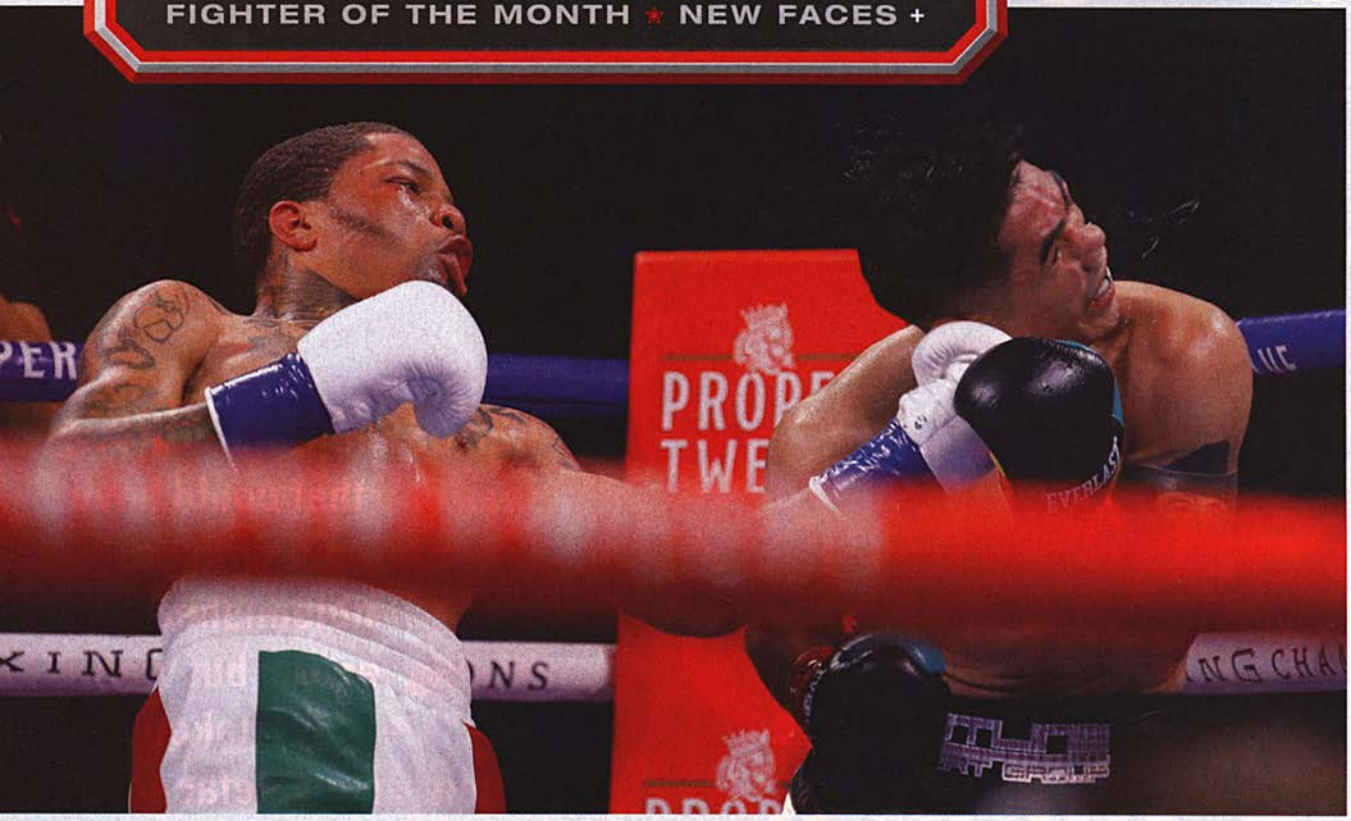
FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH



GERVONTA DAVIS

The approach was so different in Round 6. After boxing with WBA junior lightweight titleholder Leo Santa Cruz through five entertaining sessions at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas, Gervonta Davis came out of his corner to end the fight. He pursued like a sniffer dog, catching some punches from his foe as he closed the gap, but the rampaging Davis would not be put off the scent. Finding himself trapped in a corner, Santa Cruz had no choice but to battle back. The mistake he made proved costly. As Davis moved his head side-to-side, the Mexican star released a trio of straight rights, the last of which put his head over his front foot. That's just what Davis had been waiting for. The talented and powerful Baltimore southpaw countered in a flash with a rapid and brutal left uppercut to the jaw that rendered Santa Cruz unconscious upon impact. The official time was 2:40. It was the kind of statement knockout that fight fans will never forget, made more special by the fact that Santa Cruz had never been stopped or seriously hurt in a decorated 14-year professional career. As spectacular as the ending was, however, several anxious minutes passed before the former four-weight world titleholder regained his senses. Thankfully he did and, as expected, Santa Cruz was all class in defeat. Meanwhile, Davis has kicked open the door to the big time. This was his debut as a pay-per-view headliner, and what an introduction it was. Cheered on throughout the fight by former five-weight world titleholder Floyd Mayweather Jr., Davis enjoyed the same kind of breakout moment that his mentor experienced 15 years ago against Arturo Gatti, whom he also stopped in six rounds. That was the first of many Mayweather pay-per-view bonanzas that saw the pound-for-pound superstar establish himself as the highest-paid athlete in history. Davis (24-0, 23 knockouts) now has the chance to capitalize massively on a career-best triumph, and the three-time 130-pound titleholder certainly has the competition available to do just that. Potential matchups against the likes of Teofimo Lopez and Vasiliy Lomachenko, among others, give this explosive 26-year-old the enviable opportunity to take his reputation and bank balance to greater heights.

ESTHER LIN

NEW FACES

CHAINOI WORAWUT

By **Anson Wainwright**

Birth name: Thattana Luangphon
Age: 23
Born: Bangkok, Thailand
Hometown: Phra Phutthabat, Saraburi Province
Weight class: junior featherweight
Height: 5-foot-5½ (167 cm)
Turned pro: 2018
Pro record: 12-0-1 (11 knockouts)
Trainer: Chuchart Luangphon
Manager: Bank Thainchai Pisitwuttinan
Promoter: WP Boxing/Nakornloung Promotions

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Worawut is most happy with his performance against Japanese import Daichi Matsuura in December 2019.

"It is actually the only fight that I did not win by knockout in boxing so far, so it might be surprising to my fans why I like this fight," Worawut told The Ring through his promoter, Bank Thainchai Pisitwuttinan.

"I like the fight because I was very relaxed the whole fight. My right hand was injured during the fight, so I decided not to risk hurting it more and decided to fight smart. I was not thinking about knocking out the opponent, and I got to try different techniques and skills. I was able to show my fans the different sides of my boxing skills."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: The big-punching 23-year-old was less than impressive against Alvin Medura in October 2019.

"It was a big fight for me because Medura had just come off a big win," he explained. "I really wanted to showcase my power and focused on knocking him out to be impressive, so I was not paying enough attention to my defense. He caught me with a big hook late in the first round and I got knocked down.

"I later came back and won by TKO, but it would have been a way better fight for me if I did not get caught with that punch. But the fight has been a good learning curve for me. I have been working on my defense more and I think I got to become a more complete boxer from that fight."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: With only around 15 fights overall, Worawut's amateur boxing credentials aren't particularly noteworthy. However, he was a Muay Thai star with more than 200 professional contests, as well as around 20 Muay Thai amateur bouts following his pro career.

"I became well-known when I fought on the Channel 7 Muay Thai program," he said. "The fight that made my name was when I beat then-superstar Bovy Sor Kor Sungai Gym when I was 16 years old. Most people thought I could not win that fight because I was too young, but I did."

Worawut was on the Thailand Muay Thai national team and won gold at the World Championships in 2015 and at the World Martial Arts tournament in 2017. He needed a new challenge, though.

"I felt that I might have hit the ceiling in Muay Thai," he said. "When I tried professional boxing, I felt like it suited me better. I am able to leverage my punching power more. I feel like boxing is something I can do really well, and it became my passion."

"Rockman" is with the same promoter as former junior bantamweight champion Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, and although he lives in a different province, he has sparred with his popular stablemate on a handful of occasions.

"I learned a lot from him," said Worawut. "He has good fundamentals and sharp punches. His punching power is very strong, even though he is smaller than me. I gain so much experience every time I spar with him."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: WBC representative Kevin Noone, who lives in Bangkok, has long championed Worawut's cause but feels he needs to improve in a few areas.

"He's not as technical as other boxers; he's very rugged," said Noone. "However, he makes up for his shortfalls by being extremely strong. He's mentally very strong and anyone he can hit, he can knock out. He is still very raw. He needs to start facing more experienced and durable levels of opponents as he looks to get his title shot."

STORYLINES: Worawut was born into a fighting family in Bangkok but now lives and trains in the Saraburi Province about 50 miles from the Thai capital.

"[My two brothers and I] all fought Muay Thai," he said. "My dad was one of the Muay Thai superstars, and my uncle, Takrolek Detchrat, used to be a world-ranked professional boxer."

The youngster took up Muay Thai when he was just 7 years old and quickly followed in his father's footsteps.

"Growing up was difficult at times for our family," he said. "My dad trained me in Muay Thai. We trained and fought really hard. We got everything we have from Muay Thai."

When Worawut was 19 years old, he was traveling home from dinner with friends when out of nowhere and for no reason he was involved in a near-fatal shooting.

"A motorcycle ... followed our car until we stopped at an intersection. Then he shot into our car, seven to 10 shots," Worwut said, recalling the harrowing incident. "I was on the passenger seat, and I was the only one who got hit by the bullets. A bullet cut through my stomach from behind to the front.

"I did not know that the bullet actually went through my body until I went to the hospital. I had an operation three hours later. The doctor said I had only five more minutes to live until I would have died from internal bleeding."

Fortunately, the surgery went well.

"When I woke up later from the operation, the first words I said was, 'Can I still fight?' I thought I would not be able to fight anymore, because the wound after the operation was very bad. But I recovered very quickly. I could walk within a week. The doctor was very surprised.

"However, I needed to stop fighting in professional Muay Thai because I needed time to recover completely.

"Then, around three years later, the opportunity came for me to fight in professional boxing with the WP Boxing series. I took the opportunity, and it has been a great journey in professional boxing so far."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

WP BOXING

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

"TWO TON" TONY GALENTO AND MORE

Long before George Foreman was eating cheeseburgers and Andy Ruiz defied the body-shamers, there was "Two Ton" Tony Galento. But Foreman and Ruiz succeeded in the ring where Galento failed. And unlike Foreman and Ruiz, Galento wasn't a nice guy.

Domenico Antonio Galento was born in Orange, New Jersey, on March 12, 1910. During a 15-year career that began in 1928, he compiled a 80-26-5 ring record with 57 KO wins and 6 KO losses.

Listed as 5 feet 9 inches tall, Galento fought at 183 pounds early in his career. In his later years, he tipped the scales at weights as high as 247 pounds. His stomach, it was written, "looked like a tidal wave of mud." To complement his lifestyle and supplement his income, he owned and operated a bar in Orange.

Galento was frequently belligerent and, speaking of whomever he was scheduled to fight next, often proclaimed, "I'll moida da bum." On a less charming note, he was a dirty fighter, known for the mantra, "I don't see anything wrong in sticking your thumb into a guy's eye."

The high point of Galento's career came on June 28, 1939, when he challenged Joe Louis at Yankee Stadium for the heavyweight crown. Louis was 25 years old and in his prime, having won his most recent three fights (including his fabled devastation of Max Schmeling) by knockout in the first round. Galento (who outweighed the champion by 33 pounds) was ranked by The Ring as its No. 1 heavyweight contender and was riding a wave of 11 consecutive knockout victories.

Galento had never been knocked down in a prizefight. That changed courtesy of a straight right-left hook combination from Louis in the second round. Then, surprisingly, a compact left hook to the jaw dropped the champion in the third stanza. In that moment, Galento reached what for him was the summit of his ring career. But Louis had higher mountains to climb.

In Round 4, the Brown Bomber started landing at will. When Joe Louis landed at will, the opponent was in big trouble. With Galento staggering helplessly around the ring, referee Arthur Donovan stopped the carnage with 31 seconds left in the round.

Three months after losing to Louis, Galento returned to combat and knocked out Lou Nova in the 14th round of what is widely regarded as one of the ugliest, most foul-filled major fights of all time. In Galento's next outing, he was stopped by Max Baer in seven rounds. Baer complained afterward that Galento, who was known for refusing to bathe in the days leading up to a fight, "smelled of rotten tuna and a tub of old liquor being sweated out."

The end years were hard for Galento. In 1977, suffering from diabetes, he underwent surgery to remove his left leg at mid-calf. In July 1979, his right leg was amputated. Later that month, he died from a heart attack.

It's considered poor form to speak ill of the dead. But one might quote Hall of Fame trainer Ray Arcel, who said of Galento, "Nobody liked him, except maybe the guys who hung out in his saloon."

★ ★ ★ ★

In the "golden age of boxing," Hollywood and the sweet science went hand-in-hand. The Set-Up, which premiered in 1949, is one of the better boxing movies from that era and an entertaining diversion during these difficult times.

Robert Ryan plays Bill "Stoker" Thompson, an aging club fighter matched against an up-and-coming heavyweight prospect named Tiger Nelson on a seedy club fight card in Paradise City. Thompson's manager (Tiny, played by George Tobias) and trainer (Red, played by Percy Helton) have taken a bribe from a mobster named Little Boy (Alan Baxter) to ensure that Stoker goes down in the third round. Nelson has agreed to carry Stoker through the first two stanzas. Tiny tells Red that they'll divide the bribe money between themselves.

"What about Stoker?" Red asks.

"Why cut him in?" Tiny counters.

"Stoker can still punch," Red cautions. "If anything goes wrong, Little Boy—"

"Don't be a meathead," Tiny interrupts. "Nelson will butcher him. It's a hundred to one."

"Two Ton" Tony Galento may not have looked the part, but his chilling punch power was potent enough to knock the great Joe Louis off his feet.

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"That's just it. There's always the one."

The film is great fun. Most of the movie is set in the dressing room before the fight and then in the ring for the climactic battle. The drama builds nicely. The good guys are good and the bad guys are bad. The blood lust of the crowd is chilling. Black and white cinematography recreates the club fight atmosphere well.

Audrey Totter plays Stoker's long-suffering wife, who wants him out of the fight game now. "I remember the first time you told me, 'I'm just one punch away from a title shot,'" she reminds him. "Don't you see? You'll always be just one punch away. How many more beatings do you have to take? Maybe you can go on taking the beatings. I can't."

The Set-Up was the No. 1 grossing film in the United States when it premiered in 1949. The New York Times called it "a sizzling melodrama" painted in "harsh, realistic terms." Adding to that realism was the fact that Ryan boxed as an undergraduate at Dartmouth and was the school's intramural heavyweight champion for all four of his years on campus.

★ ★ ★ ★

The 1981 encounter between Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns is on the short list of greatest fights in boxing history. Trailing by four points or more on each of the judges' scorecards through 12 rounds, Leonard dropped Hearns in the next stanza and ended matters with a ferocious onslaught in the 14th round.

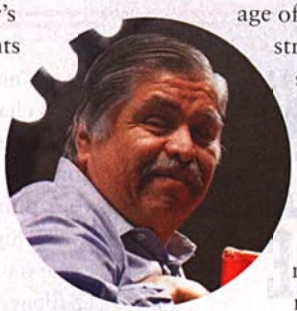
So . . . If Leonard could have been at any fight in boxing history as a spectator, which one would it have been?

"The first Ali-Frazier fight at Madison Square Garden," Ray answers. "It was a great fight and every type of VIP was present – a who's who in Boxing's Mecca."

And if Leonard could have talked at length with any fighter ever?

"I would have enjoyed a long conversation with Jack Johnson," Ray says. "He was one of many African Americans who paved the way for me to be where I am today."

★ ★ ★ ★



Ricardo Jimenez was a beloved figure in the boxing community.

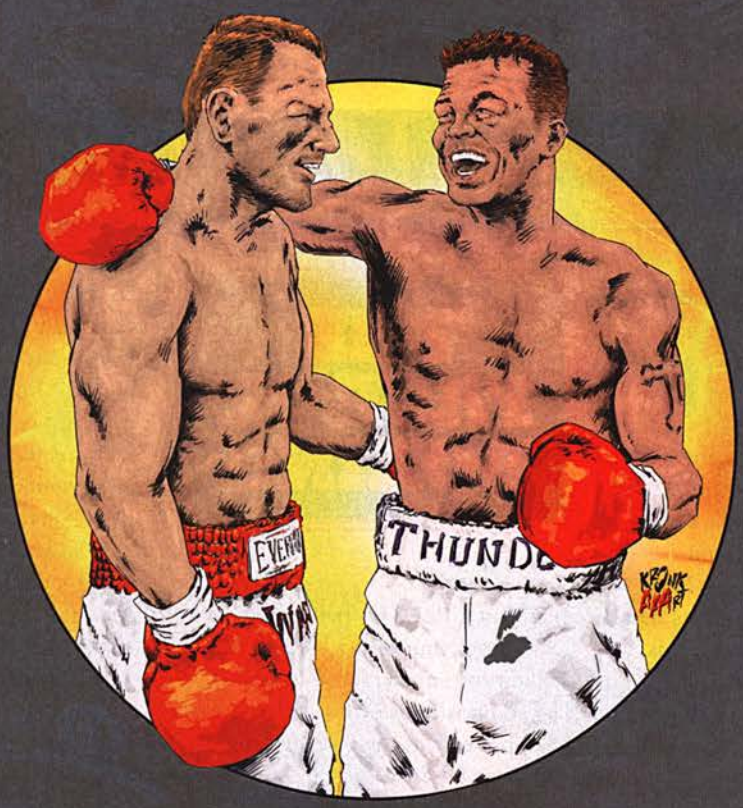
Ricardo Jimenez died on October 11 at the much-too-young age of 64 in the wake of a stroke that he suffered several days earlier.

Ricardo was one of the nicest people in boxing. A soft-spoken man with a round face and neatly-groomed walrus mustache, he served for years as a publicist for Top Rank and was the promoter's interface between the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds in boxing.

Jimenez treated everyone with respect. That included all members of the media, whether we worked for a large television network, a major metropolitan daily or a small internet site. He was unfailingly courteous, always returned telephone calls, and whenever possible facilitated the fulfillment of requests for information and access. He understood what writers need and walked the extra mile to get it for us. Everyone – fighters, writers, trainers, managers, promoters, even rival publicists – liked him.

This one really hurts.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. He will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame with the Class of 2020.*



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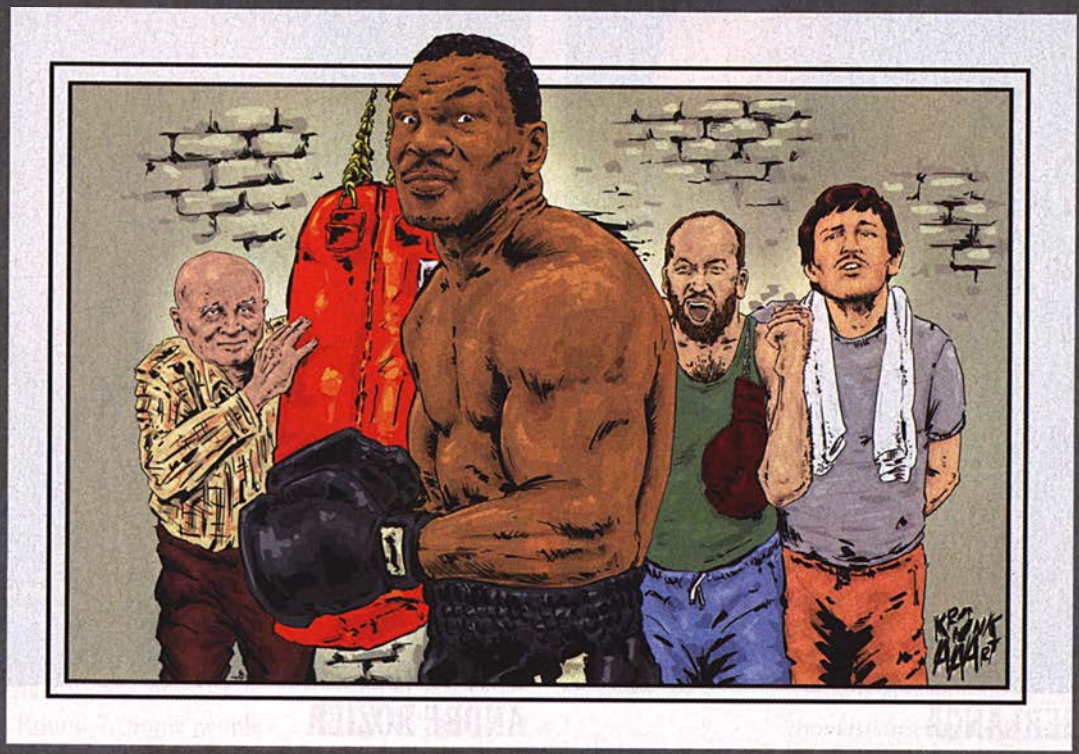


GALLERY **PRINTS** **T-SHIRTS**

EDGAR BERLANGA: KO 1

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

Knockouts fire the imagination. Edgar Berlanga, a 23-year-old super middleweight from New York who's undefeated in 15 fights with 15 first-round knockouts, is on fire.

Berlanga evokes memories of Tyrone Brunson, the Philadelphia middleweight who started his career with 19 consecutive first-round knockouts between 2005 and 2008. But Brunson's first 15 opponents had a composite ring record of 37 wins, 63 losses and 6 draws at the time he fought them, and only one had a winning record. Currently, Brunson's ledger stands at 28-8-2 (25 KOs).

Edwin Valero began his career with a similar knockout streak, reeling off 18 consecutive first-round knockouts between 2002 and 2006. Ultimately, Valero won world titles at 130 and 135 pounds and ran his record to 27-0 with 27 KOs before self-destructing, murdering his wife and committing suicide while in prison. The composite record of Valero's first 15 opponents at the time he fought them was 80-84-8.

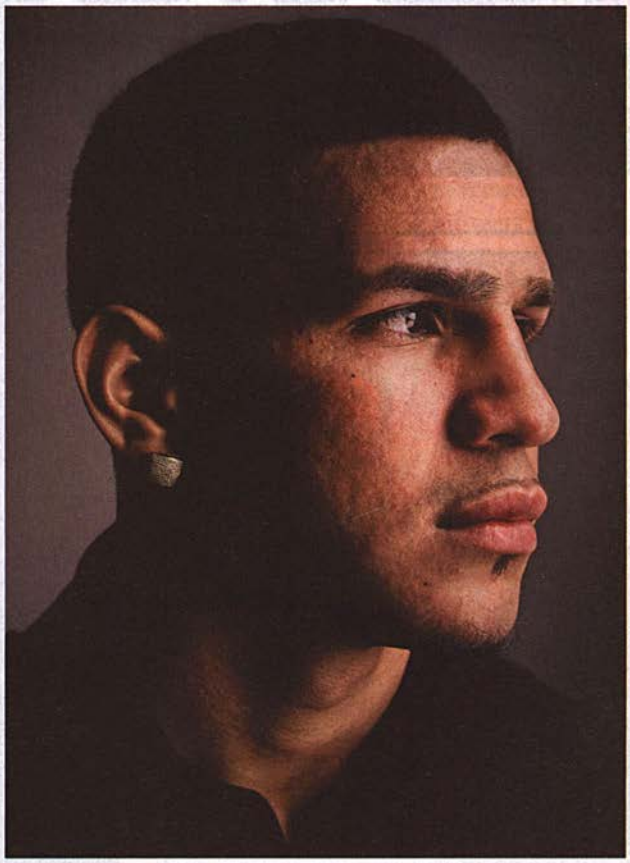
THE FACE OF BOXING

By comparison, Berlanga's first 15 opponents had a composite ring record of 160 wins, 66 losses and 13 draws, and 12 of them had winning records.

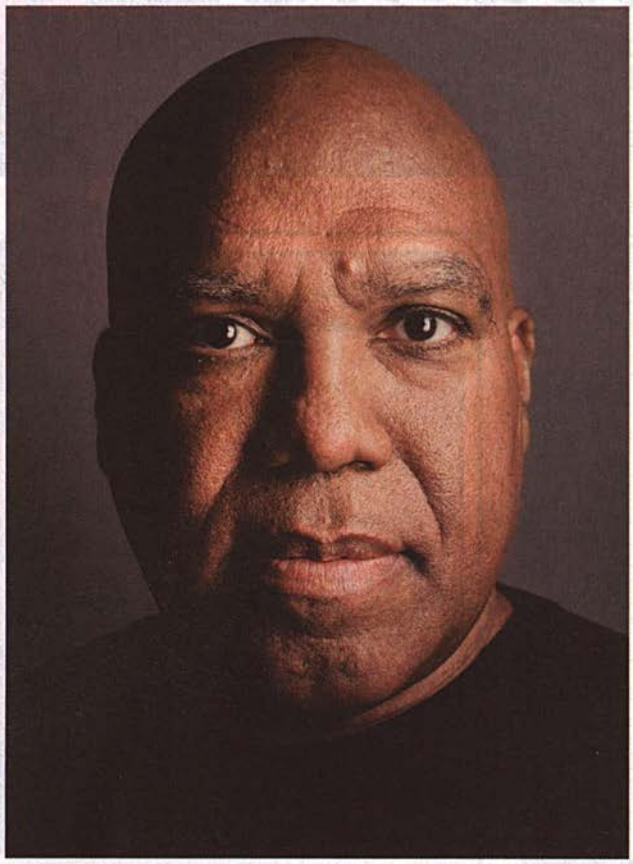
"I took these photographs at the final press conference for Gennadiy Golovkin against Sergiy Derevyanchenko," Wojtek Urbanek recalls. "Edgar wasn't on the card, but he was at the press conference with his trainer, Andre Rozier, who also trained Derevyanchenko. Edgar wasn't getting the attention then that he is now. But when he stood in front of my camera, he had the look of a special fighter, very confident and strong."

How good is Berlanga?

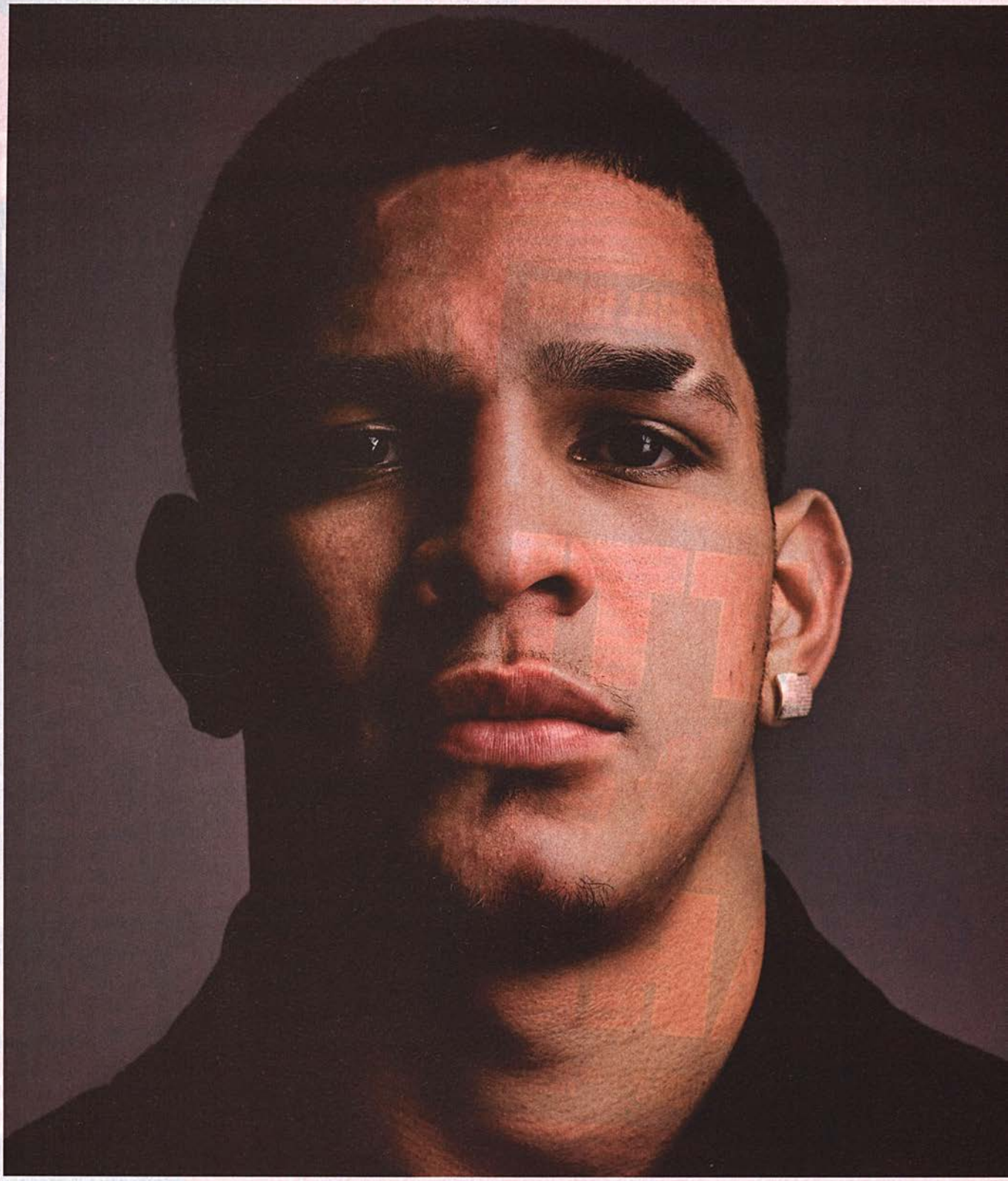
"I know he works hard in the gym," says Bruce Trampler, the Hall of Fame matchmaker for Top Rank (Berlanga's promoter). "I know he hits hard. There's a lot to like about him. But I want to see what happens when Edgar is in with a guy who can take his punch. What happens when he gets hit by a guy who can really



EDGAR BERLANGA



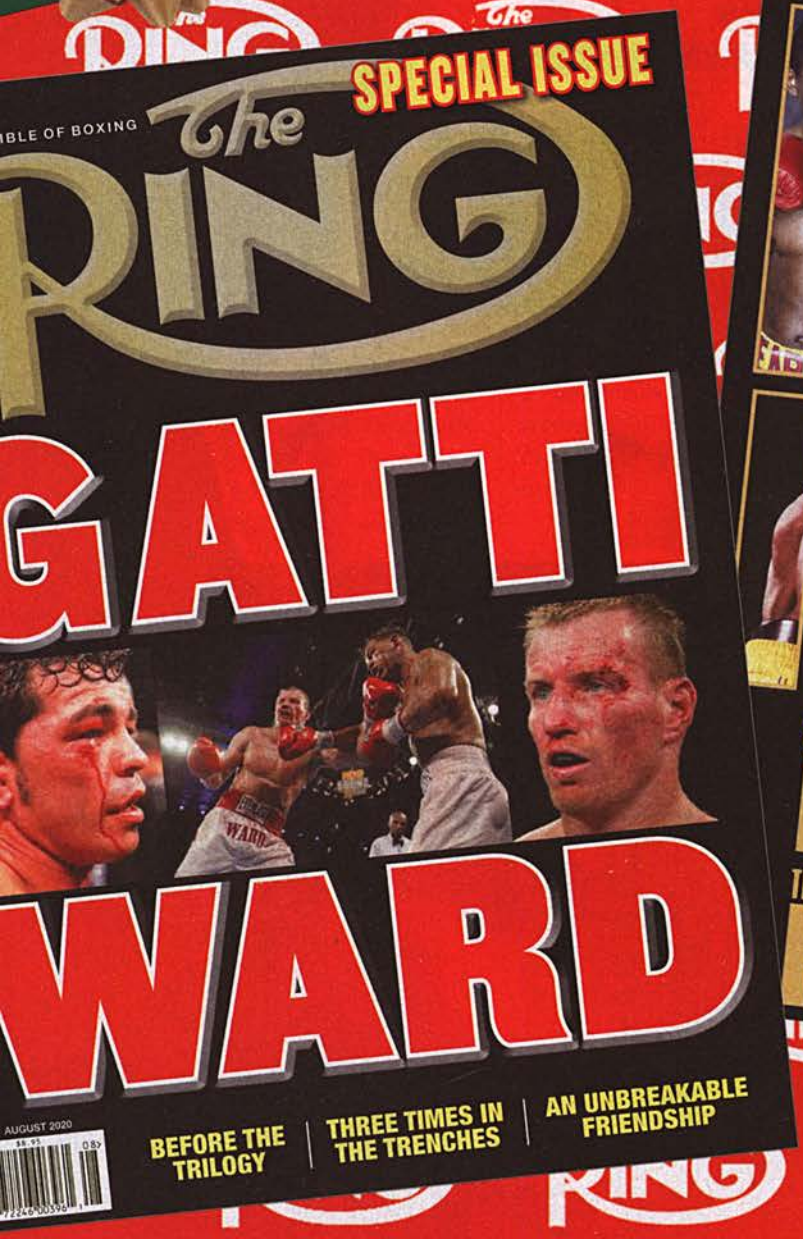
ANDRE ROZIER

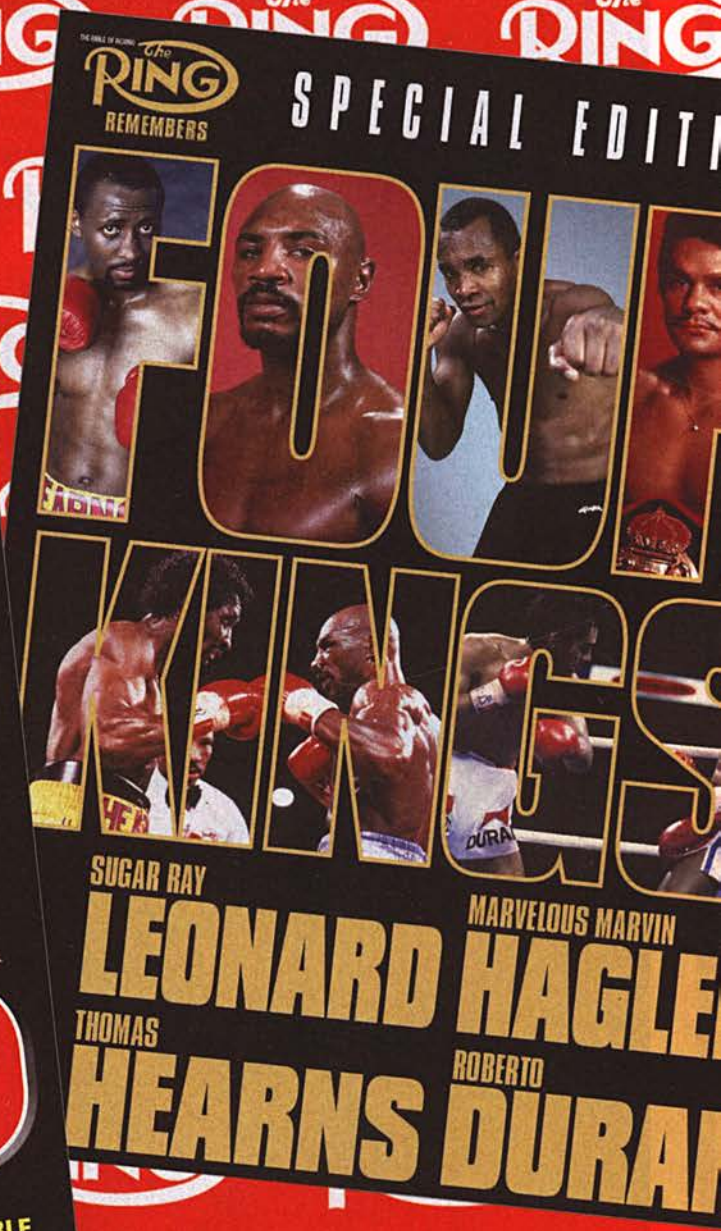


hit. What happens when his trainer has to take his mouthpiece out, rinse it off and put it back in between rounds; when he's sitting on his stool and hears the ring announcer say, 'Round 6, Round 7.' Some people will be disappointed if Edgar doesn't knock his next opponent out in the first round. But that's crazy. Sooner or later, he'll have to go rounds, and it will be good for his development as a fighter." RING

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.

HIT THE RING SHOP FOR THE HOLIDAYS





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RATINGS

The Ring Ratings through fights of Nov. 7, 2020

The Ring Ratings Summary

HEAVYWEIGHT: Aleksandr Usyk (unrated) stepped up his heavyweight campaign for bout No. 2, predictably outboxing Dereck Chisora (also unrated) to a unanimous decision. The full-fledged big man from London was no pushover, though, and Usyk remained outside the top 10.

In early November, Luis Ortiz snuck a right hand around the elbow of Alexander Flores and dropped the unrated Californian for the count in Round 1, thus defending his rank at No. 5.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Jaime Munguia cracked the list after his second fight at 160, which ended in the sixth round after an uppercut opened a horrific cut on Tureano Johnson's upper lip. The former 154-pound titleholder from Mexico replaced Zhanibek Alimkhanuly at No. 10.

WELTERWEIGHT: Sergey Lipinets (No. 9 last month) fought to a draw with unrated Custio Clayton, and the suggestion was made to drop the Russian below Mikey Garcia, who beat him in a 140-pound fight. The past was deemed irrelevant and the list remained unchanged.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: After a video review, Arnold Barboza Jr.'s seventh-round "slip" was reclassified a knockdown courtesy of a left hook from Alex Saucedo (unrated), but it didn't change the fight result; Barboza chipped away at his very tough opponent with a high-volume assault to win by a comfortable margin on the scorecards, and he rose from No. 8 to No. 5 as a result. The grueling contest took an awful toll on Saucedo, though: His brain was found to be bleeding in two places (in his opinion the result of an early head clash), and the 26-year-old announced his retirement a couple weeks later.

Regis Prograis jumped back on the horse after a yearlong layoff, impressively stopping Juan Heraldez (unrated) in three rounds to reassert his position at No. 2. On the same card, Mario Barrios knocked out a bloodied and overwhelmed Ryan Karl (unrated) in the sixth round, moving from No. 8 to No. 7 on the list as a result.

LIGHTWEIGHT: The walk-ins for Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Teofimo Lopez would turn out to be a good indicator of things to come: Lomachenko's music barely had time to get started as the champ whisked past the smoke machines and ignored the camera, but Lopez – despite the lack of what should've been an arena full of people – took his time, mugged and danced down the aisle to the tune of "Another One Bites the Dust." And indeed one did. Lomachenko's inactivity couldn't even be called a slow start, since he'd already lost half the rounds by the time he took anything resembling a risk. The underdog from Brooklyn, meanwhile, was hyper-focused from the start, well-prepared for any Matrix space-time warps and ready to retaliate with the punching power that Loma was doing his boring best to avoid. The unanimous decision victory earned Lopez (No. 1 last month) the Ring championship along with Lomachenko's WBA and WBO titles (and whatever a WBC "franchise" belt is). Loma dropped to the No. 1 contender position.

Two weeks later, Australian George Kambosos Jr. won a split decision over the unrated Lee Selby (not all of our panelists agreeing that Kambosos won) and entered at No. 9, which pushed out No. 10-rated Rances Barthelemy.

Devin Haney, holder of the "disenfranchised" WBC title, then easily outpointed 38-year-old Yuriorkis Gamboa and held his spot at No. 2.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: With a left uppercut that you will definitely hear about again when we start discussing Knockout of the Year candidates, Gervonta Davis (unrated last month) relieved an unconscious Leo Santa Cruz (also unrated) of his WBA belt in Round 6. Davis' WBA lightweight belt was also on the line for some reason, but the fight took place at 130, so that'll be Tank's home for the time being. His arrival at No. 2 pushed Chris Colbert (No. 10) off the list.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Perhaps motivated by Lomachenko's tumble from the hype train, division champion Naoya Inoue didn't disappoint in his Las Vegas debut, punctuating a virtuoso performance with a short right cross that crumpled Jason Moloney in the seventh round. The Australian slipped from No. 5 to No. 7 as a result.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: A pair of fights in Mexico City on October 23 saw three of the division's elite in action, but no changes resulted (at least not on this list). 115-pound champion Juan Francisco Estrada recovered from a third-round knockdown to chop down the heavy-handed Carlos Cuadras (No. 10) for an 11th-round stoppage. In the co-feature, Roman Gonzalez (No. 2) defended his WBA belt with a wide unanimous decision over Israel Gonzalez (unrated). In a perfect world, which we clearly do not inhabit at this time, these two fights would open the door to a long-awaited Estrada-Gonzalez rematch. You can check out Ricardo Celis' story elsewhere in this issue for a deeper dive into how soon that fight might happen.

FLYWEIGHT: Also on the Mexico City card, No. 3-rated Julio Cesar Martinez defended his WBC title with a second-round TKO of former strawweight contender Moises Calleros and held his position in the list.

No. 5-rated Andrew Selby, who suffered the only loss of his 14-fight career against Martinez in March 2019 and last fought in September of that year, announced his retirement at the age of 31. The Welshman's departure created a vacancy at No. 10 for Angel Acosta.

Finally, Junto Nakatani (No. 7 last month) captured the vacant WBO title with an eighth-round knockout of Giemel Magramo (unrated) and rose to No. 5.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**TYSON FURY** RING, WBC	U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
1	**ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO	U.K. • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)
2	**DEONTAY WILDER**	U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
3	**ALEXANDER POVETKIN**	Russia • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
4	**DILLIAN WHYTE**	U.K. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
5	**LUIS ORTIZ**	Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
6	**ANDY RUIZ JR.**	U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)
7	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
8	**MICHAEL HUNTER**	U.S. • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)
9	**OSCAR RIVAS**	Colombia • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)
10	**KUBRAT PULEV**	Bulgaria • 28-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF	Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
1	**YUNIEL DORTICOS**	Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
2	**ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC	Congo • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
3	**KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**	Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)
4	**KEVIN LERENA**	S. Africa • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
5	**ANDREW TABITI**	U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	**LAWRENCE OKOLIE**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
7	**ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA	France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
8	**THABISO MCHUNU**	S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)
9	**ALEKSEI PAPIN**	Russia • 12-1-0 (11 KOs)
10	**MICHAL CIESLAK**	Poland • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC	Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
2	**DMITRY BIVOL** WBA	Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
3	**SERGEY KOVALEV**	Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)
4	**JOE SMITH JR.**	U.S. • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)
5	**JEAN PASCAL**	Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)
6	**BADOU JACK**	Sweden • 22-3-3 (13 KOs)
7	**ELEIDER ALVAREZ**	Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
8	**MARCUS BROWNE**	U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
9	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 20-1-0 (19 KOs)
10	**UMAR SALAMOV**	Russia • 25-1-0 (19 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CALLUM SMITH** RING, WBA	U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)
1	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
2	**CALEB PLANT** IBF	U.S. • 20-0-0 (12 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY DIRRELL**	U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)
4	**CANELO ALVAREZ**	Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
5	**BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO	U.K. • 29-0-0 (14 KOs)
6	**CALEB TRUAX**	U.S. • 31-4-2 (19 KOs)
7	**JOHN RYDER**	U.K. • 28-5-0 (16 KOs)
8	**FEDOR CHUDINOV**	Russia • 23-2-0 (16 KOs)
9	**DAVID LEMIEUX**	Canada • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
10	**DANIEL JACOBS**	U.S. • 36-3-0 (30 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Nov. 7, 2020

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA
  Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA**
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **KAMIL SZEREMETA**
  Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **8** **ROB BRANT**
  U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **9** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
- **10** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (29 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **1** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 27-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **3** **JEISON ROSARIO**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO**
  Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** WBO
  Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **10** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** WBA
  Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 26-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS**
  Russia • 16-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10** **MIKEY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 40-1-0 (30 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **KIRYL RELIKH**
  Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **9** **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV**
  Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

Giemel Magramo (left) got a few good shots in against Junto Nakatani on November 6 in Tokyo, but Nakatani ultimately demolished his Filipino opponent with an eighth-round KO to win the vacant WBO flyweight title.

Former 154-poound titleholder Jaime Munguia (left) broke into the middleweight rankings with a sixth-round stoppage of Tureano Johnson, who sustained a horribly split lip from an uppercut and couldn't continue.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **LUKE CAMPBELL**
  U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **ROBERT EASTER**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- **9** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **EMMANUEL TAGOE**
  Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

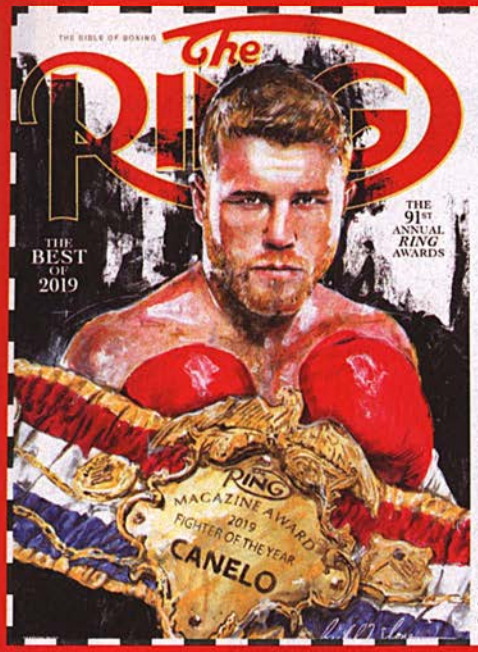
- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** WBC
  Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** IBF
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- **6** **RENE ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 32-8-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI ITO**
  Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **8** **ANDREW CANCIO**
  U.S. • 21-5-2 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MIGUEL ROMAN**
  Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **10** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **XU CAN** WBA
  China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **4** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (27 KOs)
- **6** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **9** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RUBEN VILLA**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **REY VARGAS**
  Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 21-0-1 (16 KOs)
- **6** **ANGELO LEO** WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
  Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **STEPHEN FULTON**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)



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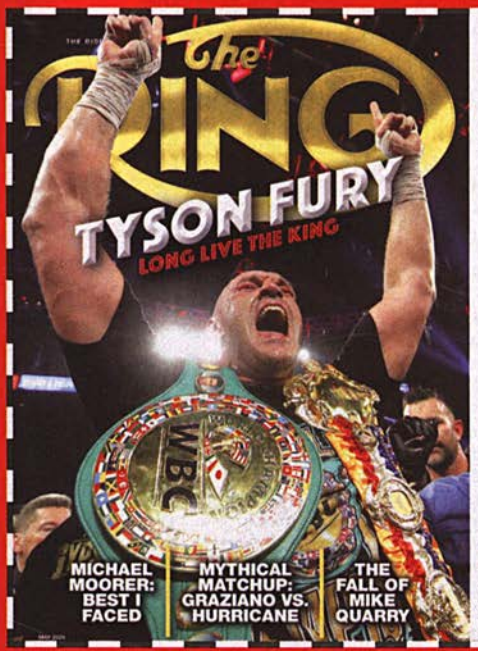

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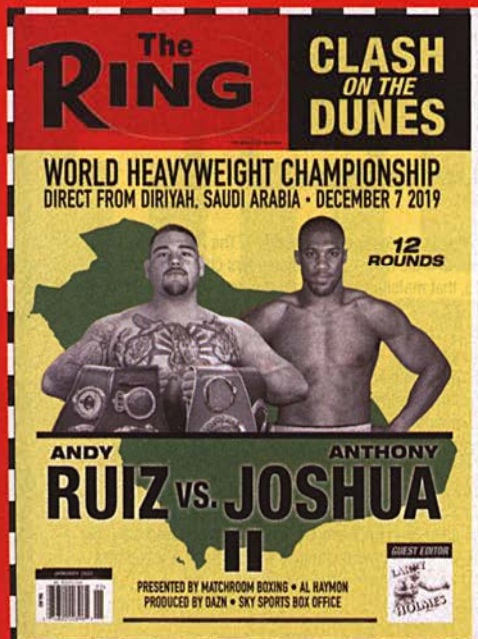

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RATINGS

Through fights of Nov. 7, 2020

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
  France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Philippines • 30-4–0 (21 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE**
  S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **OSCAR NEGRETE**
  U.S. • 19-2-2 (7 KOs)
- **10** **MIKE PLANIA**
  Philippines • 24-1–0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
  Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 49-5-1 (42 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** WBA
  Nicaragua • 50-2-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 25-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **KHALID YAFAI**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 17-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON**
  P.R. • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KOSEI TANAKA**
  Japan • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
  S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **3** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5** **JUNTO NAKATANI**
  Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **MASAYUKI KURODA**
  Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **GIEMEL MAGRAMO**
  Phil. • 24-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **JAY HARRIS**
  U.K. • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **ANGEL ACOSTA**
  Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3** **CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA**
  Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO**
  Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA**
  Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 11-0-2 (6 KOs)
- **10** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** WBC
  Thailand • 54-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **4** **BYRON ROJAS**
  Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
  Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
  S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **PEDRO TADURAN** IBF
  Phil. • 14-2-1 (11 KOs)
- **9** **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Phil. • 15-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **NKOSINATHI JOYI**
  S. Africa • 29-5-1 (19 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

- **1** **CANELO ALVAREZ**
  Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **2** **NAOYA INOUE**
  Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
  U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **ALEKSANDR USYK**
  Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
  Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **9** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
  Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **10** **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
  Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

Ring Magazine bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue turned back the challenge of No. 7-rated Jason Moloney and targeted his rival titleholders at 118 pounds.

POUND FOR POUND SUMMARY:
The Lopez-Lomachenko fight touched off the longest P4P conversation the panel has seen in years.

The first proposal was to bring the previously unrated Lopez in at No. 6 and drop Loma (No. 2 last month) to No. 8. The response was gentle at first, suggesting that a six-spot plunge for the three-division titleholder, who until further notice is still the guy known for making fighters his own size quit on their stools, was "excessive."

The debate escalated after another panelist wondered if Lopez should even enter at all after a single victory, saying the P4P list uses "other factors like longevity and consistency, which Teofimo does not yet possess." The suggestion was to leave him out for now and drop Loma to 6 – but 8 for the new champ and 9 for the ex-champ if Lopez's inclusion was seen as essential. Then things got more heated as a panel member tersely stated that Lopez should enter at No. 4 and Lomachenko should be dropped entirely. Another agreed, denouncing "mere slaps in the wrists of the losers and loose rearrangements in the positions of each fighter. Empires rise and fall. Loma's fell."

"Removing Lomachenko for a narrow points loss to arguably the best young fighter in the sport?" said yet another panelist. "I don't know guys, that's more than a tad hyperbolic in my opinion.

"A young junior welterweight edged an old featherweight."

Lots of names and lots of comparisons came up as panelists made their cases, and the final compromise ended up being pretty much where the argument started: Lopez in at No. 6, Lomachenko down to No. 7.

The list got another jostle after Estrada beat Cuadras, but the junior bantamweight champ's one-spot promotion just put him back into the No. 8 rank he'd had before Lopez's arrival (which pushed out Manny Pacquiao, incidentally). The fighter who took the brunt of all the movement was Gennadiy Golovkin, who suddenly found himself at No. 9, two notches below where he'd been last month. The victories by Inoue (No. 2) and Usyk (No. 4) resulted in no changes, though Davis' knockout of Santa Cruz brought up the idea of drafting Tank. It'll most likely happen at some point.

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Nov. 12, 2020

POUND FOR POUND

1 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

2 **KATIE TAYLOR**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)

3 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 38-1-1 (28 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)

7 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 28-3-3 (9 KOs)

9 **MARCELA ACUNA**
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)

10 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **ALICIA NAPOLEON ESPINOSA**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)
5 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 25-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 **TORI NELSON**
U.S. • 20-2-3 (4 KOs)
3 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **TAYLA HARRIS**
Australia • 7-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CLARESSA SHIELDS** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE** IBF
Canada • 17-0-0 (0 KOs)
3 **HANNA GABRIELS** WBA
Costa Rica • 20-2-1 (11 KOs)
4 **MIKAELA LAUREN**
Sweden • 32-6-0 (13 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JESSICA MCCASKILL** IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)
2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 43-13-5 (KOs)
4 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 19-6-0 (0 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA LINARDATOU** WBO
Greece • 13-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-4-0 (10 KOs)
5 **KALI REIS WBA**
U.S. • 17-7-1 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.K. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 7-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 **NICOLE WESNER**
Germany • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)
2 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 17-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 19-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBO
Puerto Rico • 38-1-1 (28 KOs)
2 **JELENA MRDJIENOVICH** WBA, WBC
Canada • 40-10-2 (19 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **HEATHER HARDY**
U.S. • 22-1-0 (4 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN** IBF
U.S. • 18-3-1 (1 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARCELA ACUNA** IBF
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)
2 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 35-4-4 (16 KOs)
3 **MAYERLIN RIVAS** WBA
Venezuela • 16-4-2 (10 KOs)
4 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)
5 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 16-2-0 (5 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** WBO
Argentina • 28-3-3 (9 KOs)
2 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 52-3-2 (30 KOs)
3 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-4-1 (0 KOs)
4 **DEBORA DIONICIUS**
Argentina • 30-2-0 (6 KOs)
5 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 20-3-1 (3 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ** WBC
Mexico • 20-9-0 (6 KOs)
2 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 30-5-3 (4 KOs)
3 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 22-3-0 (4 KOs)
4 **ESMERALDA MORENO**
Mexico • 35-12-2 (11 KOs)
5 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 9-0-0 (4 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 18-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 28-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **LOURDES JUAREZ**
Mexico • 30-2-0 (4 KOs)
4 **AVA KNIGHT**
U.S. • 19-2-5 (5 KOs)
5 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 8-1-0 (1 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **YESICA BOPP** WBA
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **TSUNAMI TENKAI** WBO
Japan • 27-12-1 (16 KOs)
4 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 12-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
Mexico • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 10-0-1 (3 KOs)
2 **ANABEL ORTIZ** WBA
Mexico • 31-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 20-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ETSUKO TADA**
Japan • 19-3-3 (6 KOs)
5 **AYAKA MIYAO**
Japan • 23-8-2 (6 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 14-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **SAEMI HANAGATA** IBF
Japan • 16-7-4 (7 KOs)
3 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 16-0-1 (5 KOs)
4 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
5 **NAO IKEYAMA**
Japan • 18-6-4 (5 KOs)

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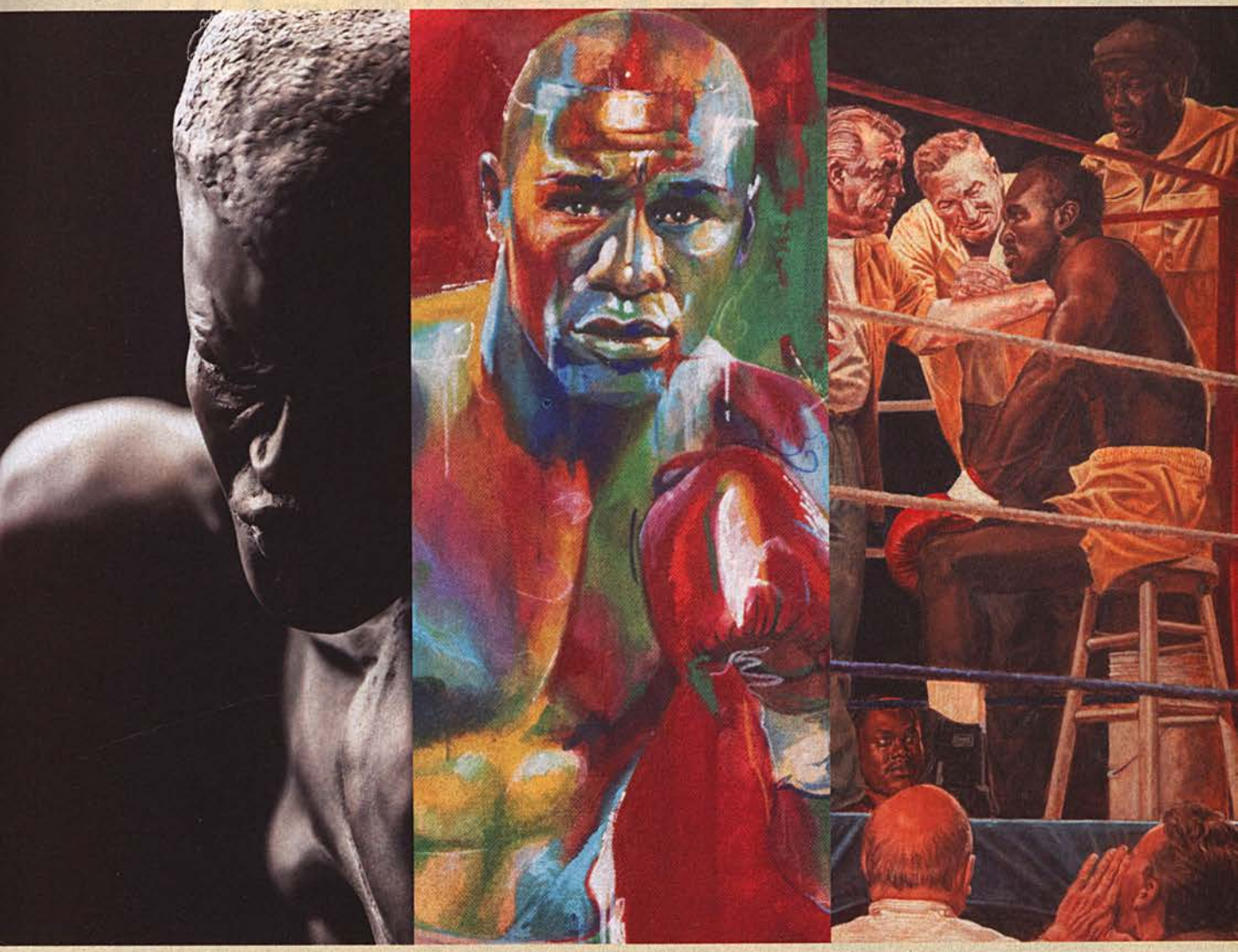


TAKEOVER ACCOMPLISHED

TEOFIMO LOPEZ WAS SUPPOSED TO GET LOST IN 'THE MATRIX' VS. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**, BUT THE NEW LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION'S UPSET VICTORY GUARANTEED HE'LL NEVER BE UNDERESTIMATED AGAIN

By **Dan Rafael**

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

All of these belts and the Ring lightweight championship were on the line in this high-stakes matchup.

After the scorecards were read and Teofimo Lopez Jr. was declared the winner by unanimous decision over Vasiliy Lomachenko, a boxer many viewed as pound-for-pound No. 1, the new Ring lightweight champion paused for a moment before motioning to those in the ring to get out of his way.

Lopez needed space in order to launch into his usual celebratory post-fight backflip, which he pulled off with aplomb. He then added a new finishing wrinkle, dropping to his back in the center of the canvas and sweeping his arms and legs back and forth as if he were making snow angels.

"The Takeover," as he had nicknamed himself, was complete.

"I earned my damn respect at 23 years young. Who is this? Teofimo!" said Lopez, getting a little emotional soon after his enormous victory. Not only had he claimed the Ring championship, he also retained his IBF belt for the first time and took Lomachenko's WBA and WBO titles (plus the veteran's controversial WBC "franchise" strap).

But beyond the belts strapped around various parts of his body as he stood beside the ring in the conference center at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, where no fans were permitted due to the coronavirus pandemic, one fact dominated the post-fight scene: Lopez had fulfilled the prophecy envisioned by his father and trainer, Teofimo Lopez Sr., years earlier. The father had insisted his son would become an elite star and defeat the decorated two-time Olympic gold medalist and three-division world titleholder from Ukraine, and he had.

"My son had the kryptonite for him," Lopez Sr. said. "He gave him a whupping, and that's what we said he would do."

The son steadfastly promised to make Pops look good.

"I fought what people say was pound-for-pound [number one]. I outboxed him. I won most of the rounds, won it by unanimous decision," he said. "I'm thankful, man. Loma was a hell of a fighter. He knows what he's doing. But his time is over."

Lopez (16-0, 12 KOs), of Brooklyn, New York, who represented his parents' birth country of Honduras in the 2016 Olympics, looked like he might make the fight a rout. He threw and landed many more punches than a shockingly inactive Lomachenko, who took his penchant for slow starts to new heights – perhaps a combination of a 14-month layoff and a right-shoulder injury revealed after the bout. While Lopez applied constant pressure, backed him up and landed solid jabs, right hands and body shots, Lomachenko could only muster a punch here and there. The Ukrainian threw only 58 total punches in the first half of the fight, according to CompuBox, and got hit more than usual. After seven rounds, all three judges had Lopez winning 70-63, a shutout.

However, Lomachenko (14-2, 10 KOs), a proud champion making his fourth defense of the Ring Magazine

and WBA titles and his third of the WBO belt, would not go easily into the night. The 32-year-old southpaw mounted an impressive rally in the second half. He picked up the pace and finally started winning rounds. But with Lomachenko appearing to have cut significantly into his lead, Lopez did what champions are supposed to do: He closed the show by clearly winning a barnburner 12th round that included fierce toe-to-toe action and a nasty accidental headbutt in the final 10 seconds that opened a cut over his own right eye. Lopez landed 50 of 98 punches in the round, both his high-water marks in the fight, to leave no doubt.

The CompuBox statistics certainly were telling: Lopez landed 183 of 659 blows (28 percent) and Lomachenko landed 141 of 321 (44 percent), but only 25 of the latter's connects came in the first six rounds. Of Lopez's 183 landed punches, 148 were power shots, the most ever landed on Lomachenko in a single fight.

Judge Tim Cheatham scored it 116-112 and Steve Weisfeld had it 117-111, which seemed to be the general consensus among media and fans on social media, while Julie Lederman's 119-109 scorecard largely drew scorn. A few folks saw a 114-114 draw, including ESPN analyst Andre Ward.

Lomachenko has been mum other than a brief post-fight interview on ESPN in which he expressed disappointment.

"I think the first half of the fight, he got more rounds than I did. But in the second half of the fight, I took over," Lomachenko said. "I was much better. I want to go home and see what I can do better. I'm definitely not agreeing with the scorecards. I thought I won the fight, but the results are the results, and I'm not going to argue it right now."

Egis Klimas, Lomachenko's career-long manager, sided with his fighter but also praised Lopez.

"I think we won the fight, at least seven rounds to five. Maybe the closest would be six-six, even," he said. "I think round number two and numbers six to 11 were for Loma. Lopez won round number 12; 119-109 is out of the question.

"But no questions about it, Lopez did very good. He never got tired, even in the very last round. He was completely fresh. He was aggressive; he was coming with punches. Of course I will give him the credit. It's my opinion that even to win five rounds against Lomachenko is already a big thing."

Lopez Sr., the bad cop to his son's good cop when it came to trash talking, displayed unusual serenity after the fight.

"I got to give Lomachenko a lot of respect for taking those big shots," he said. "He wanted to win. He just couldn't figure out my son. My son was the better man. We did something people thought we couldn't do: We

It's not often that Lomachenko, a known defensive wizard, catches clean power shots like this one from Lopez.

TAKEOVER ACCOMPLISHED

outboxed him. We gave him a clinic, and I'm just so glad, man. Everything I said came into existence.

"We just made the best boxer in the world look like nothing, so we're here to stay for a long time. This kid's only 23 and making history."

Lopez Jr. exuded confidence going into the fight and it burst through even more afterward.

"I expected more. A lot of people were talking highly about him and I expected more, but he was pretty basic, honestly," Lopez said. "Maybe it was a 14-month layoff that did it. I don't know. I mean, I had a 10-month layoff, so why does it matter?

"We talked the talk and we walked the walk. That's what I do, man. My father just doesn't talk shit just to talk shit. He believes in my abilities. I'm smart when I'm in there, you know, and I peeped a lot of things. But facing someone like that and doing what I did, you guys haven't seen anything yet."

Soon after the fight, it was revealed that Lomachenko injured his right shoulder in training and required two pain injections. Two days after the October 17 bout, Lomachenko underwent surgery to repair the same area of his labrum that he injured against Jorge Linares when he won the Ring/WBA lightweight titles in May 2018, which also led to surgery.

"We lost training, we lost sparring because of two injections," said Klimas, adding that they were both disclosed and approved by the Nevada State Athletic Commission and the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association, which oversaw drug testing for the fight. "One was six weeks before the fight, and then three weeks before the fight we did another injection because he hurt the shoulder in sparring. Everything is documented."

Klimas said when Lomachenko hurt his shoulder throwing an uppercut in sparring, his father/trainer Anatoly Lomachenko said the fight should be postponed, but the fighter would have none of it.

"Loma right away said, 'If you're going to take this fight from me, I'm gonna quit boxing,'" Klimas said. "He said, 'I'm gonna hang up my gloves.'

"I said I would let them decide it. I didn't want to be in the middle, but inside of me, I didn't want the fight to happen. But already too much had been said, too much talk. It would be crazy from our side to make this excuse that Loma was injured. If we are injured, we shouldn't be coming to the ring. If we came to the ring, we have to fight, and we did."

Klimas made it clear that Lomachenko prefers an immediate rematch but added that his star fighter would also be happy returning to junior lightweight, the division Lomachenko has regularly said is really where he belongs.

"I think Lopez needs the rematch more than Lomachenko. ESPN says we had [nearly] 3 million viewers, which means it was a huge fight," Klimas said. "If we're going to come back in a rematch, we're going to have even more viewers. And should Lopez beat Lomachenko a second time, he is going right away to the sky. In his shoes, he will need that rematch even more to make the most money. Who is he going to fight to make more money than if he's not going to fight Loma? Second, let's say Lopez would lose a rematch. We would be willing to include in the contract a third fight. That would be even bigger and better than number one or two.

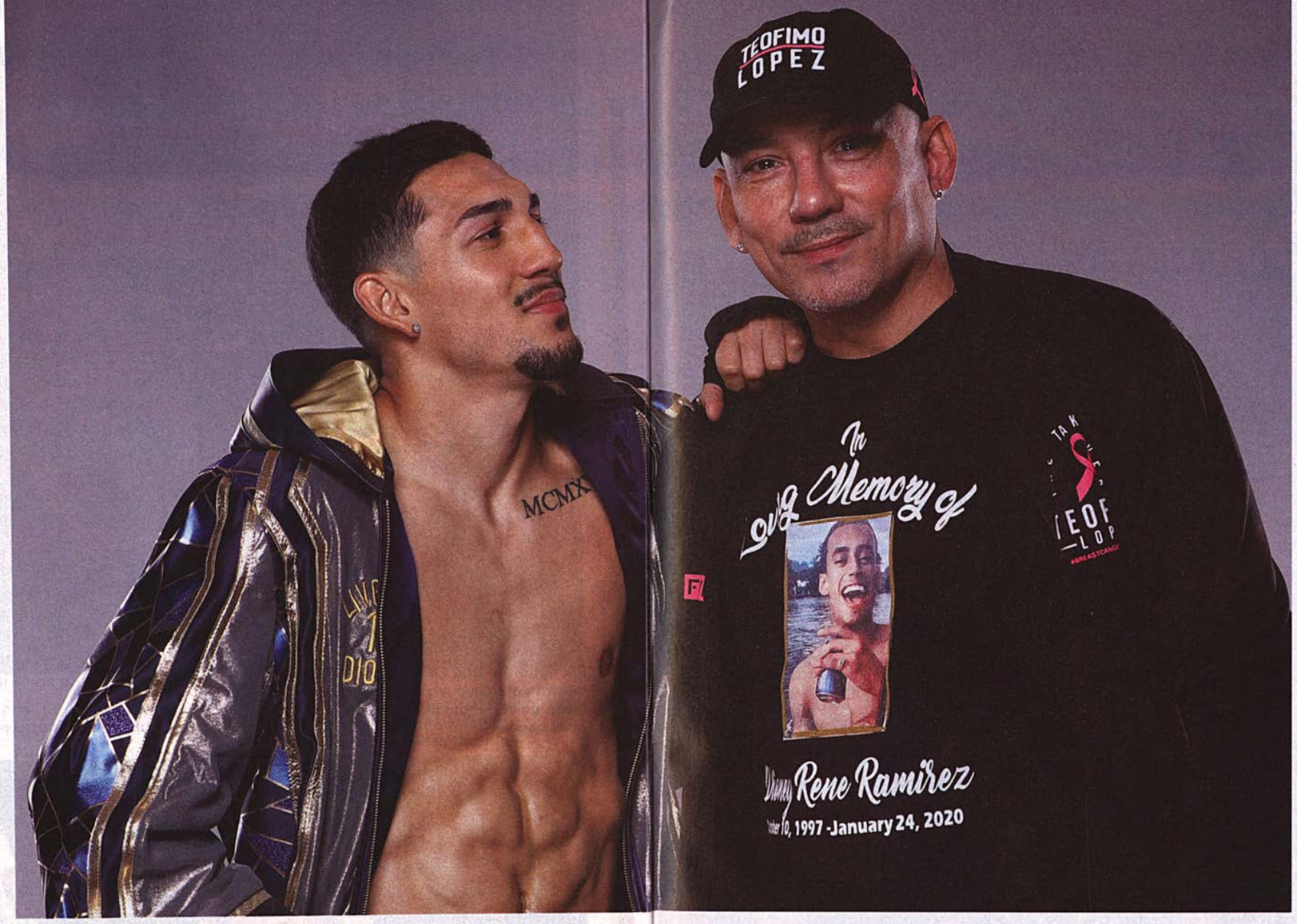
"Lomachenko is in a position where probably a lot of people saw him lose to Lopez and in that position he can get almost any big name. If we're going to go to (WBC lightweight titleholder) Devin Haney tomorrow, they will sign a contract to fight Lomachenko. If we're going to go to (Gervonta) 'Tank' Davis, they will sign a contract to fight Loma. Ryan Garcia, he will go sign very easily. Loma is in a good position."

Promoter Top Rank has options for Lomachenko at junior lightweight. He could challenge for a title against the winner of the fight between Miguel Berchelt and former featherweight titlist Oscar Valdez. There is also whoever emerges with a belt once the Jamel Herring-Carl Frampton winner faces Shakur Stevenson in the spring.

"Loma has already made his name," Klimas said. "Everybody knows he was pound-for-pound. He might have lost that line on the list today, but if he goes back to 130 pounds, he will make a statement."

Lopez, who had surgery a week after the fight to repair microfractures and ligament damage in his right foot that he suffered in training, wanted to enjoy his victory and was unsure of his next move, although he said he isn't interested in a rematch.

"For what? I beat him and I did everything that I had to do to beat him," Lopez said, noting the contract didn't contain a rematch clause. "If anything, it'll happen again, the same thing. Now it's time for us to take over and move forward. That's it. I told y'all, man: Out with the old, in with the new."



MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

Father and son proved to be the ultimate team in their first superfight.

Lopez could face his IBF mandatory challenger, unbeaten Australian George Kambosos Jr., who outpointed former featherweight titlist Lee Selby in an October 31 eliminator. Top Rank chairman Bob Arum also has designs on a fight between Lopez and Puerto Rican attraction Felix Verdejo in June in New York, assuming fans can attend.

And there is also a trio of notable names in the division that would make for attractive fights, though hard ones to make due to promotional and network hurdles: Haney, Davis and Garcia, the last of whom must first deal with Luke Campbell.

Of that group, Lopez said he prefers Haney, which would clear up the dispute over rightful ownership of the WBC title.

"If I took that fight, it's just for bragging rights, to shut him up and destroy his career," Lopez said.

Teofimo Sr. wants his son to move up to junior welterweight.

"I think it's time for him to move up and go try to get all the belts at 140 pounds," he said. "There's no reason we have to stay at 135 unless they give us something to fight for. So it all depends, but I'd rather him go to 140. He's been suffering at this weight for like seven years already."

Lopez Jr. also has interest in moving up. Top Rank controls all the junior welterweight belts, and Arum said he would happily match him in late 2021 with the winner of the undisputed title fight he's planning between unified titleholders Jose Ramirez and Josh Taylor for the first half of 2021. That's appealing to Lopez.

"I would love to definitely unify at 140, take all the belts and become undisputed champion back-to-back," Lopez said. "Hell, yeah! There's so much more I want to do, so much more to accomplish. This is just the beginning."

PIECING TOGETHER A CHAMPION

TEOFIMO LOPEZ TALKS ABOUT HIS HUNGER FOR MAKING HISTORY, THE VALUE OF BEING MYSTERIOUS AND THE UNCANNY ALLURE OF JIGSAW PUZZLES

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

When he's not dazzling the world with his fists, Teofimo Lopez Jr., the brassy 23-year-old lightweight king from Brooklyn, New York, currently makes his home in Jonesboro, a city in the northeast corner of Arkansas. It's his sanctuary away from the ring, a safe haven where he can be himself.

Two days after Lopez stunned the world by upsetting southpaw stylist Vasiliy Lomachenko for the Ring/IBF/WBA/WBO championship in October, he spoke candidly in an hour-long interview with The Ring about his still-fresh present, his ambitious future and – very reluctantly – about the real Teofimo.

His loud persona is for the world to see, though privately he's much different. It's one of the many misconceptions about boxing's newest star. After beating Lomachenko in Las Vegas, Lopez's manager, David McWater, had a huge spread planned for the 135-pound champ. But where some sports celebrities like to unwind by basking in their glory at a glitzy nightclub, Lopez had other plans.

Instead, he went to Topgolf, which is a combination driving range and nightclub, and hit golf balls for a few hours. Team Lopez even had to convince Topgolf to stay open a little longer so "The Takeover" could get in some extra swings.

Lopez had no entourage, no hangers-on. It was Lopez and his wife, Cynthia, his family and close friends.

When he got back to Jonesboro, his newfound penchant for jigsaw puzzles competed with finishing the construction of his home.

Spend enough quality time with Lopez and you find that his bravado is mostly for show. You discover that when the cameras are off and the media horde is gone, he's a very laid-back guy who likes simple things. He admits that he lets people see only what he wants them to see.

He's funny. He's engaging. He's cerebral, surprisingly humble in intimate settings, and he's good for boxing.

After beating Lomachenko, he has also become one of the prime faces of the sport.

THE RING: Going into the Lomachenko fight, you and your camp kept saying you knew something about him. You couldn't reveal it then. What was it?

TEOFIMO LOPEZ: I guess it was growing up with southpaws; I was always around them and I learned from them. I'm surprised I never turned southpaw myself. But being around southpaws so much, I learned the good things that they do and the things that they're not good with. Facing a southpaw (like Lomachenko) is a lot easier for me than facing orthodox fighters.

My father saw that, too, so [in a fight against Lomachenko], we knew what would happen. We talked the fight into existence, and the new face of boxing emerged as an undisputed world champion. I'm happy to pave the way for everyone else.

We knew that you had to have confidence to go against someone like [Lomachenko]. That was the difference between what I did and everyone else who faced him. I was getting head-butted, but shit happens. I stopped him from going left, and every time he tried it, I turned him. I have footwork and I was the naturally bigger man.

THE RING: When you watched a replay of the fight, what did you see?

TL: I obviously scored the fight for me. (laughs) Being in there, I saw it 9-3 or 8-4. That's what I saw. I keep

count of the rounds when I'm fighting. I knew the rounds that I won and I knew the rounds that I lost. I knew I won the first seven rounds. He didn't do anything.

I knew there were rounds when I was slacking a little. I knew what he was trying to do. I kept telling myself to stay smart. By the 12th round, he was getting gassed. I saw he was getting tired, and that's when I stepped it up. I hated the fact that he didn't do anything. It was boring. You have to have the right dance partner. I didn't know what it was with him.

THE RING: Do you think he gave you too much respect?

TL: He was afraid of me. He thought those little quick movements he has would be enough, and it wasn't. I reversed the table on him. I threw back at him what he does to other guys.

When he was actually in the ring with me, he saw how much bigger I was than him. He also found out I hit a lot harder than he thought. I came as a complete surprise to him, and he had no idea what to do with me.

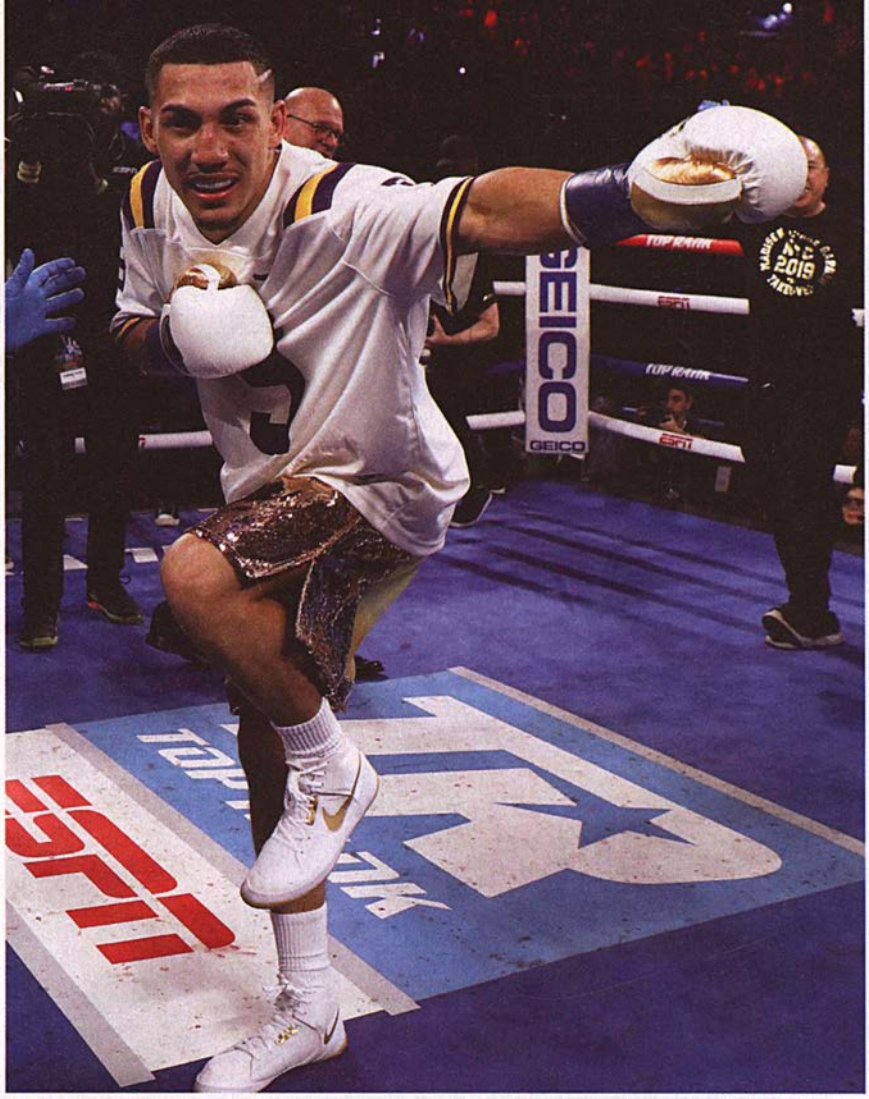
Halfway through the first round, I could tell I had his respect. That's what I felt. That's what I knew. It's when I started to pick up the pace and keep him at bay.

THE RING: Were you surprised by the times when Lomachenko stayed in the pocket and exchanged with you?

TL: I was waiting for him to do that. I was waiting from the first round, and he didn't give me that. I kept waiting and waiting, and I stayed composed. Even when he had his little moments, I wanted to stay composed. I thought he was going to come at me in the first round. He never did. The moments when he did come at me, I was ready for it.

THE RING: What were you telling yourself during the fight?

TL: I kept saying that he's going to come strong and to stay composed, keep sticking the jab, watch the left – he's going to go to the body, which I knew was coming and was ready for. That's what surprised him. I could tell. He didn't think anyone could outthink him in the ring. I was hacking the matrix. (laughs) That frustrated the hell out of him.



As well as boxing, Lopez is also partial to a song, a dance and a backflip.

THE RING: You made 135 relatively easy for this fight. How long do you want to stay there?

TL: Making 135 was not an issue. However, it's been a while that I've fought at 135, and I'm growing more and more. I don't know how much longer I'll stay at 135. I don't know, I may go to 140. We know where we are. I feel great, but I'll feel a lot stronger and massive at 140.

THE RING: Do you see one more fight at 135 or two more fights there?

TL: I don't know. We're still talking about that. I just cleaned out the 135-pound division, so if I do fight, it will be just for bragging rights. With Richard Commey, it was putting icing on the cake. With Lomachenko, it was putting the cherry on the top.

Now I can eat my cake. We had to beat the guys that were in front of me. I did. Now I'm a world champion. That was that. In order to be the best, you have to beat the best, and I did. [Lomachenko] was considered the best, or one of the best; I went out there and showed otherwise. I showed I'm better.

THE RING: There are some attractive possibilities at 135, like Devin Haney or Gervonta Davis. Do any of them impress you enough to get into the ring with them?

TL: No, not really. I'm the king of the jungle and everyone is hunting me. That's fine. I'm ready to eat. I'm hungry. If they're calling me out,

they better be ready, because I'm not afraid to fight anyone. I already proved that. I'll step up. None of those guys impress me enough to stay at 135 for them. I made weight easy for Richard Commey – that was my big task. I made it easy. If I struggled making weight, I would have thought about moving up and see what I would do next.

When I made weight easy, that's the reason why I fought Lomachenko. I felt phenomenal for Commey, and from that moment, I knew I could beat Lomachenko. What was upsetting is we were supposed to fight in April and then COVID-19 hit. Then we were supposed to fight May 30. COVID stopped that. Then it was October 3rd, then finally October 17th.

It sucked. But those were the days thrown at us. If I could maintain weight for all of that time, I knew we could make it.

THE RING: When I say Devin Haney, you say what?

TL: Devin Haney, I think he's a good fighter. But he hasn't shown much yet to me to be at my level. Honestly, I can fight any of these cats. I'm all about entertainment. That's all it is. Can they make a good fight?

THE RING: How about Gervonta Davis?

TL: I look at it like this: Let's see what they do. They all need to do their parts to build themselves. I can't say I want anyone. I'll take anyone anywhere. I would love to fight (Ring/IBF/WBA junior welterweight champion) Josh Taylor or (WBC/WBO junior welterweight titlist) Jose Ramirez right now and combine those titles.

I'll fight anyone. It doesn't matter to me. I want to make history. I want to be the undisputed champion at 140, too.

I know I can do it. Lomachenko tried it and failed. I'm down to go to 140 anytime. Right now, I'm enjoying this moment. They have to wait for me. They need to come to me. I worked my ass for that. I'm going to stay ready and stay in shape.

THE RING: Has any of this success sunken in yet?

TL: Honestly, I'm still processing it. Once it hits me, I want to maintain that same hunger. I want to stay in shape year round.

THE RING: It is interesting, because just a few minutes ago, you were still talking like a challenger, like you have to go after these cats. You've always been the one chasing, chasing. You're the one on the mountaintop and it doesn't seem like you're used to that mindset yet. Is that accurate?

TL: It is. What I did is not enough for me yet. I have so much more to do, and what I did in beating [Lomachenko] was just the beginning. That hunger is always going to be there. I can't lose it. I'm driven.

When I talk like that, it's not like I'm talking like a challenger in my mind. I want more belts. I want more of the glory. I want to be one of the best of this era.

THE RING: When I say "a star is born," what do you think?

TL: I have to get used to that. This is still new. I'm going back to Jonesboro, Arkansas,

Masayoshi Nakatani asked questions of Lopez but was soundly defeated on points.

SCOTT TAETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

and I can't believe I live out there. I'm still Brooklyn all day. They may give me a pitchfork, a cornfield, I don't know. (laughs)

I already spoke to my wife about when we go on vacation, I still want to work out. I want to maintain my physique. I want to put some muscle back on. I don't really feel that different. I know I'm the best. But I always thought I was the best. What would you want me to say? I feel like I'm the motherfucking champ! (laughs)

THE RING: So, success hasn't changed who you are?

TL: Look, the belts don't make me; I make the belts. I want to stay who I am. I learned early that nothing in life is promised. My parents deserve a lot of credit for how they raised me. They taught me the right way. But I also get a lot from what I learned from these GOATs, whether it was boxing, basketball, football. I took in what they did well in their careers and what I could learn from them.

I could say I learned ambition from Mike Tyson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Tommy Hearns, Marvin Hagler, Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Magic Johnson, just watching how they carried themselves, how they were and how they were leaders.

I was always taught that you have to earn it. This is bigger than me. It's always been bigger than me. I'm going to show the fans what they want to see. I got the job done – I beat someone no one thought I could beat.

THE RING: I got to spend a lot of time with you prior to the Lomachenko fight, and a thing I noticed is that you like to be underestimated. You're more intelligent than you like to reveal to the public.

TL: That's on them. I know who I am. I think I gave the majority of these fighters a belief that they could do it. If I tell you I'm Godzilla, you best believe that I'm Godzilla, but really I'd rather sit back and relax. It's the way I've always been. I'm just out to make a new statement in my life and a new statement for boxing and make boxing exciting again.

I hope I broke that chain, that we can make big fights happen. Everyone expects to make (Floyd) Mayweather money. It doesn't happen unless you work for it and fight the best. Everyone has to stop being bitches.

THE RING: It seems like when I refer to you as being an intelligent guy, it makes you feel uncomfortable. Why?

TL: No, not really. I have no issue with that. Everyone has their point of view about me. I can tell you Lomachenko thought I was dumb. He found out otherwise. (laughs) I have to be two steps ahead of everyone. I don't want people to know how smart I am. Let them think the way they want to think about me.

It's the quiet ones who speak the loudest. I'm very observant from afar, and I'll check out what type of environment that I'm in. I let people know only what I want them to know. It's the mistake [Lomachenko] made. He didn't think I was as smart as him – in or out of the ring. He just heard all of the pre-fight stuff. Go ahead and make that mistake. Like I said, I'm two steps ahead of everyone else.

You're on cue with a lot of these things.

THE RING: When you beat Lomachenko, why did boxing also win?

TL: Because it's the takeover. Boxing needs a new guy. It's time for the new generation. Boxing won that night because I am boxing. I brought the new wave. Boxing needs megastars. I gave the sport a new face. Call me Doctor Takeover. (laughs)

This is bigger than me.

THE RING: You really don't like to talk about yourself, do you?

TL: No, not really. I really don't. I'll talk about myself on camera, hell yeah! But once everything and everyone is gone, I can be me. I don't have to put on "the show." At home, I look at it like everyone has to be who they truly are.

Some people have small goals. I have big goals that I have to accomplish in a short period of time. I'm just one of those cats who thinks that this is bigger than me. I have to think that way. I can't let all of this stuff and all of this praise get to my head and change me. That's when you slack up. I can't slack up. I have new levels no one has seen yet. I'm even better than what everyone saw against [Lomachenko]. And I'll give the people what they want. I'm going to be brashy and I'm going to be the one who wants to take over everything, but once the cameras and the media are gone, I can go back to being me and who I really am.

I'm really not big-headed. I can act big-headed, but I'm not. (laughs) When you get big-headed, you think you have it all. I still have a lot to do. I'm really a pretty laid-back guy. I'm someone, believe it or not, who anyone can walk up to and say hello. I want to be a superstar who the fans can know.

THE RING: But you are guarded.

TL: I am. Boxing is a business, and you have to watch who you can trust and who you can't trust. It's good people don't know who I really am. My wife calls me "Fimo," and there is "The Takeover." My wife knows me. She likes "Fimo."

I'm trying to make a difference. Look at Michael Jordan when he did the Last Dance: He was an asshole, but he was also the best for everyone. It's good people misjudge me, and I'm fine with that.

One thing no one can ever misjudge about me is that I'm going to give people a hell of a fight. I'm going to entertain. You're going to get that. All of the other stuff I can give two fucks about.

THE RING: What's the deal with you and jigsaw puzzles?

TL: I love my puzzles. If I want to, I can sit down and do a whole 500-piece puzzle. I wanted to do my puzzles during fight week, but they take time, and I knew once I started doing my puzzles, there was no way I was going to get up from the table. I lock in. It's hard to get me up from the table.

I don't like to work my way in from the edges; I like to be different. (laughs) I like to work my way in from the middle, because it's harder. I learned to work my way with it. I learned patience. My wife got me into jigsaw puzzles. She brought a few games and the jigsaw puzzles for the Commey fight.

I noticed she started doing a 300-piece puzzle and I sat with her and she was working on the edges. I started in the middle to connect with her, and I started to get really zoned in. My wife saw that I liked it, and I really enjoyed it. I have a very special woman in my wife. She's healed me in a lot of ways, and she's more special than she realizes.

THE RING: How quickly would you like to get back into the ring?

TL: We'll see how everything goes. I'm focusing on building my house in Jonesboro, which I started from scratch before the Lomachenko training camp. I still have to heal from the cut over my right eye.

You know, Lomachenko never congratulated me, that motherfucker. (laughs) He's an asshole. He got what he deserved. I went over to him after the fight to say, you know, "Good fight." Loma's father was understanding, but Loma was laughing. I felt like saying, "Fuck you, too." I was the one laughing last. I knew I won. I embarrassed him. I love the fact that people like me now. RING

Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for Ring Magazine/RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. He can be followed on Twitter @JSantoliquito.

Following a strong Lomachenko rally, Lopez remained composed and closed strong.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK VIA GETTY IMAGES

TEOFIMO LOPEZ LEADS A **'FAB FIVE'** OF LIGHTWEIGHTS WHO APPEAR READY TO STAMP THEIR MARKS ON THE SPORT – HOPEFULLY BY FIGHTING EACH OTHER

By **Michael Montero**

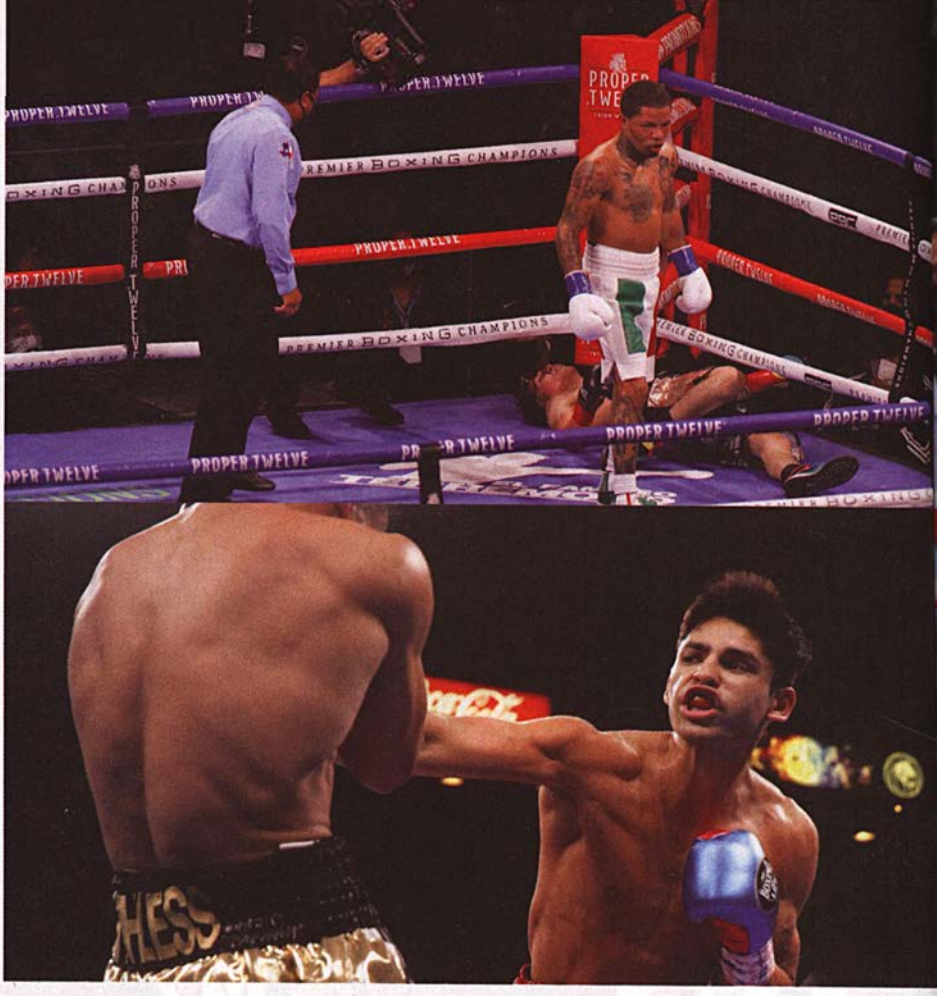
When Teofimo Lopez defeated Vasiliy Lomachenko by unanimous decision on October 17 in Las Vegas, he shook up the boxing world. The 23-year-old Lopez (16-0, 12 KOs) followed through on his promise to upset the Ukrainian, with nearly 3 million people tuning in live to watch "The Takeover" on ESPN.

The Brooklynite's victory not only crowned him as the undisputed lightweight champion of the world, it signified the beginning of a new era. Lopez and fellow Americans Devin Haney (25-0, 15 KOs), Ryan Garcia (20-0, 17 KOs), Gervonta Davis (24-0, 23 KOs) and Shakur Stevenson (14-0, 8 KOs) represent a new crop of budding stars currently fighting in or around the lightweight division.

The new school is here, and these are no ordinary freshmen.

Two weeks after Lopez dethroned Lomachenko, Baltimore's Davis scored a devastating one-punch knockout over veteran Leo Santa Cruz at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas. After fighting on even terms through five and a half rounds, "Tank" pinned Santa Cruz on the ropes and separated him from his senses with a perfectly timed counter left uppercut. Clips of the emphatic KO immediately trended on social media. The fight, which headlined a Showtime PPV card, was contested at 130 pounds. However, Davis has fought as a lightweight in the past and will likely campaign there again at some point.

Haney followed with a dominant, albeit less-than-thrilling unanimous decision victory over the faded-but-still-serviceable Yuriorkis Gamboa on



November 7.

Garcia is slated to face Olympic gold medalist Luke Campbell next. It's the biggest test to date for the 22-year-old social media influencer, who instantly became Golden Boy Promotions' star pupil after Canelo Alvarez announced he would be managing his own career going forward.

Stevenson, who won the vacant WBO featherweight title last year before moving up in weight, is currently rated No. 1 at 130 by the same sanctioning organization. He figures to be in line for a crack at the winner of a presumed fight between Jamel Herring and Carl Frampton at some point in 2021. The 2016 Olympic silver medalist has the frame to fight at lightweight in the near future as well.

Lopez, Davis, Garcia, Haney and Stevenson make up boxing's modern day version of the "Fab Five," a squad of first-year students who carried the University of Michigan basketball team to the championship game in the 1991-92 season – just trade extra-long shorts for hand wraps and gloves. There are numerous mouthwatering potential matchups that fans are already clamoring for, but will the business of boxing get in the way? Let's take a look at what lies ahead.

TEOFIMO LOPEZ

The Lomachenko win solidified Lopez as the most proven young star in all of boxing. But questions surround the 2016 Olympian coming into 2021. Two weeks after the Lomachenko fight, Lopez had surgery to repair microfractures and ligament damage in his right foot. The minor procedure required about six weeks of rest, followed by rehab, before he could get back in the ring.

Given the recent difficulties Teo has faced making the 135-pound lightweight division limit, it is conceivable that his next fight could be at junior welterweight. Promoter Top Rank is in a great position. If Lopez can stay at 135, there is of course a potential rematch with Lomachenko. If he moves up to 140, he could ultimately face the winner of a showdown between Jose Ramirez and Josh Taylor, who are expected to fight next year. The Taylor vs. Ramirez matchup would unify all of the world titles at junior welterweight and set up a very intriguing fight for Lopez. In the meantime, other potential opponents at 140 pounds include Regis Prograis, Jose Zepeda, Arnold Barboza and Jose Pedraza.

Regardless of what direction Lopez choses to take next, he is clearly the head of the class at present.

GERVONTA DAVIS

For Davis, promise and uncertainty go hand-in-hand. Inside the ring, his potential is off the charts, but there have been legal troubles outside of it. And weight discipline has been an issue as well. In fact, Gervonta lost his first world title on the scale and has come in heavy more than once in recent years. Promoter Floyd Mayweather Jr., along with Leonard Ellerbe and the rest of "Team Tank," seem to have smoothed that out, at least for now, as Davis comfortably made the 130-pound junior lightweight division limit for his bout with Santa Cruz.

Assuming legal issues and battles with the scale are things of the past, the business of boxing itself may ultimately hold Tank back. Very few of the highly rated fighters at 130-135 pounds are represented by Al Haymon. To find an intriguing opponent for Davis in the PBC universe, you have to go all the way down to featherweight. Washington, D.C., area native Gary Russell Jr. is currently rated No. 2 by The Ring and has been calling for a big fight.

After the Santa Cruz fight, Mayweather insists his protégé is now a PPV star. A Davis vs. Russell "Battle of the Beltways" fight would be fun, but it hardly rates PPV. A showdown with Teofimo Lopez certainly would. However, when asked about Lopez, Floyd pulled the "we're the A-side and he's the B-side" routine. It doesn't take a genius to understand that's basically 21st century promoter speak for "we're not interested."

Make no mistake; there are great

DAVIS: ESTHER LIN; LOPEZ: ETHAN MILLER

Clockwise from top left: Davis, Haney, Stevenson and Garcia doing their thing.

fights for Davis at 130 and 135 pounds, but his team will have to work across the aisle to make them happen. Miguel Berchelt is currently rated No. 1 in The Ring's junior lightweight ratings. The Mexican has held a world title for four years and currently poses the biggest threat in the division for Tank. And let's not forget about Vasiliy Lomachenko. The former three-division titleholder has hinted about moving back down in weight. If a rematch with Lopez falls through, a Loma-Davis bout at 130 pounds would be highly anticipated.

Mayweather used a "low risk, high reward" approach when guiding his own career and, thus far, has handled Tank's the same way. Hopefully, Davis aims to prove the naysayers wrong and take on some real challenges going forward, especially if he wants to keep fighting on PPV.

RYAN GARCIA

Much has been made about Garcia's three million followers on TikTok and 7.5 million followers on Instagram, but he has yet to back up all the hype against an elite-level opponent in the ring. That could all change if he makes a statement against Campbell. Although the Englishman has come up short in two world title attempts, he fought neck-and-neck with Jorge Linares and had moments against Lomachenko. Campbell is legit. In fact, he's been rated at lightweight by The Ring for more than three years.

Should "KingRy" take care of business against Campbell, he'll officially graduate from prospect to contender. Furthermore, he will be the WBC "interim" beltholder and next in line to face Devin Haney for his full title.

Haney vs. Garcia would be the first of hopefully many fights between two members of the Fab Five as professionals. The bout makes business sense and it's easy to promote. Haney and Garcia already have plenty of history together, having fought each other several times as amateurs. Even better, they both currently fight on DAZN, which should make negotiations between their camps less complicated.

DEVIN HANEY

Although Lopez is seen as the legitimate lightweight champion of the world, Haney currently holds the WBC strap. For unexplainable reasons, the Mexico City-based organization named Lomachenko their "franchise champion" before he fought and lost to Lopez, elevating Haney from "interim" to "full" champ via email. The asinine move was a disservice to fans who wanted to see a full unification of the lightweight division. However, it could become a blessing in disguise.

As mentioned above, the WBC has mandated that Haney face the Garcia-Campbell winner next. A second eliminator between Linares and Dominican Republic native Javier Fortuna was ordered as well, but that matchup got complicated after Linares tested positive for the coronavirus; Fortuna scheduled a fight against Antonio Lozada on November 21 and could be going in a different direction. Still, should Haney fight and beat the Garcia-Campbell winner, he might have to face the Linares-Fortuna winner down the road as well.

If Haney wants to hold on to that WBC title, his next couple of fights are already set up for him. If he decides to dump the belt, things could get difficult. Much like Davis, Haney is on the outside looking in from a promotional perspective. The 22-year-old signed with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing in 2019. Problem is, the only other top lightweight Hearn represents is Campbell, who is already facing Garcia.

SHAKUR STEVENSON

When Stevenson went pro in 2017, he looked a little unsteady on his legs. Yet over the last year or so, the southpaw from Newark, New Jersey, has begun to grow into his "man strength" and become a legitimate prizefighter.

HANEY: MELINA PIZANO/MATCHROOM; STEVENSON: MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

IN WITH THE NEW...

As mentioned earlier, Jamel Herring currently holds the 130-pound title with the WBO. He is slated to face Carl Frampton next. Should the former Marine take care of business against Frampton, a fight with Stevenson would follow. Herring vs. Stevenson would be a battle of tall, rangy southpaws. Although Stevenson is a tad shorter than Herring, he's also 12 years younger. If that fight comes to fruition, it could be a true passing-of-the-torch matchup. Best of all, both men are signed with Top Rank and fight on ESPN.

REALITY CHECK

In a perfect world, the Fab Five would all face one another in a round-robin tournament to determine the leader of the pack. But if we're being honest, that rarely happens in this era of boxing. Gone are the days of Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns fighting each other in their early primes (Leonard was 25, Hearns was only 22). Today, the global boxing landscape is bigger than ever, but it's also more fractured than ever.

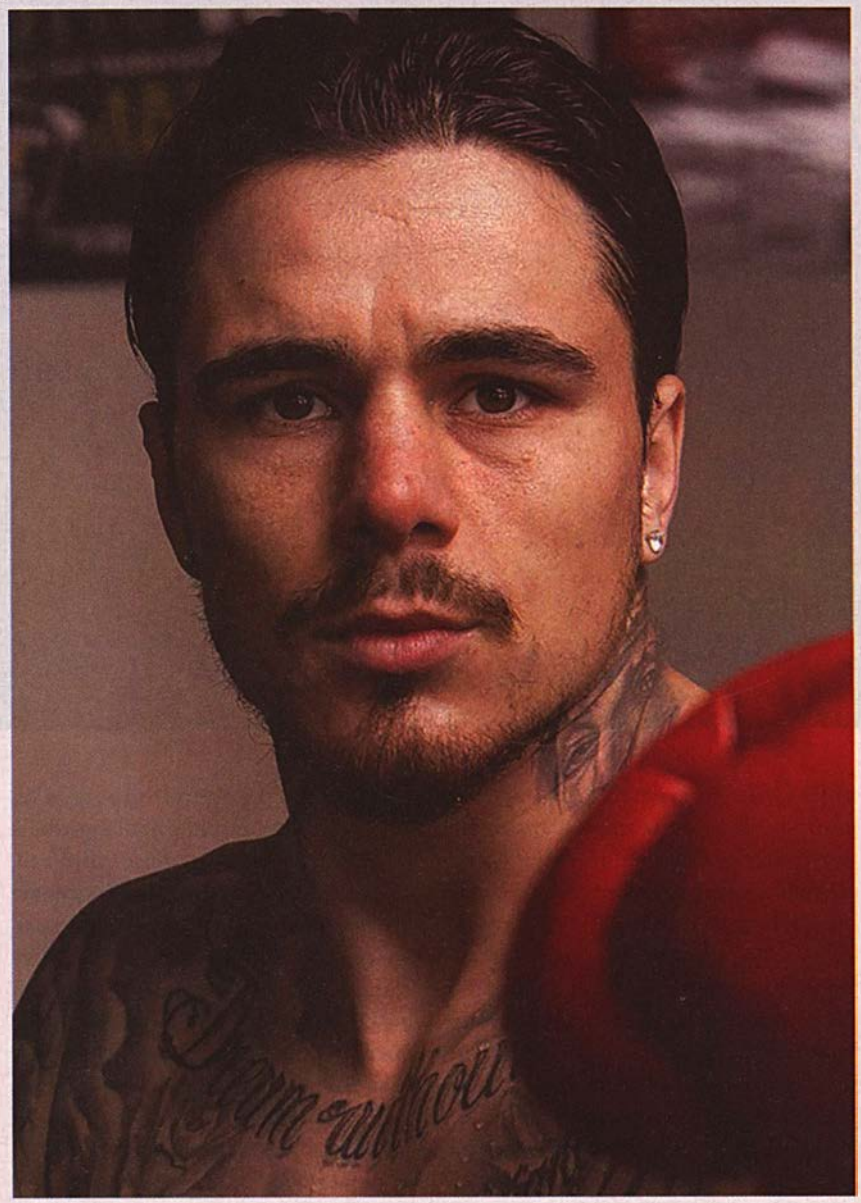
Lopez and Stevenson are with Top Rank, Davis is with PBC, Garcia is with Golden Boy and Haney is with Matchroom. All five of these young guns and their management have their own business plans in mind. So outside of a mandatory circumstance enforced by a sanctioning body (like the WBC-Haney-Garcia situation noted above), don't expect any of the Fab Five to get in the ring with each other any time soon.

If and when they do meet in the ring, it will likely be a few years down the road and a few pounds north of lightweight. But in the meantime, it will be a fight fan's delight watching the new school develop, grow and mature into the old school. RING

Michael Montero can be found on social media via @MonteroOnBoxing. His podcast "The Neutral Corner" can be seen every Monday on TheRingDigital YouTube channel and heard on audio podcast platforms around the world.

GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.

APPRAISES THE RING'S LIGHTWEIGHT TOP 10



Following a career-best win over Lee Selby, Kambosos is on the verge of securing the ultimate showdown at 135.

The Ring recently caught up with Australian lightweight contender George "Ferocious" Kambosos Jr., our newest addition to the 135-pound ratings. The 27-year-old from Sydney has scored two straight wins over former world titleholders and six straight victories on the road.

The Ring Ratings Panel placed Kambosos at No. 9 following his split decision win over Lee Selby on October 31. We asked him what he felt about his placement on the list as well as his thoughts on the rest of the fighters currently rated in our top 10.

10. EMMANUEL TAGOE, 31-1 (15 KOS), GHANA

"He's actually my sparring

partner; we train together. We're both chasing the goal. He's a good guy and I wish him all the best because we're both chasing the same thing. He's become a good friend of mine." (Note: At press time, Tagoe was scheduled to fight Mason Menard on November 27.)

9. GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR., 19-0 (10 KOS), AUSTRALIA

"I'm a very confident fighter and I believe that I'm the best lightweight in the world. I believe that I should be in the top five. I'm currently number one with the IBF; the Selby fight was an eliminator. Selby was number one with the WBO as well. So when their new ratings come out, I should be number one with them, too. I fought two former world champs back-to-back in their hometowns (Selby and Mickey Bey). I love being the underdog as I work up the ranks. I'm coming for number one."

8. JORGE LINARES, 47-5 (29 KOS), VENEZUELA

"An old-school fighter who's been there a long time. I believe his time has come and gone; the new wave is here. Linares is a guy who I watched as a young kid; I respect him. He's a former world champion. But I'm not sure he competes at the top level with the young guys anymore."

7. JAVIER FORTUNA, 35-2-1 (24 KOS), DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

"Hasn't really done too much at lightweight and really isn't well-known on the world scene. I can't say too much about him. I don't believe he should be placed in the top 10 ratings."

6. ROBERT EASTER, 22-1-1 (14 KOS), U.S.

"I don't think he's a lightweight anymore. His last fight was at 140 and I don't believe he can come close to making the lightweight division limit. So I don't think he belongs on the list as well."

5. RYAN GARCIA, 20-0 (17 KOS), U.S.

"Social media star, but hasn't done anything yet in boxing terms. I rate myself way above him as a fighter. Maybe not on social media, but when it comes to the boxing world and opponents, I'm surprised at the hype he's done at this stage. I'm looking forward to his fight with Luke Campbell because he's a very formidable opponent. I'm interested to see how he does and if he's real." (Note: The Campbell-Garcia fight, originally scheduled for December 5, was postponed after Campbell tested positive for COVID-19.)

4. LUKE CAMPBELL, 20-3 (16 KOS), U.K.

"His fight with Garcia will show us if the kid can stand up against the elite of the division, and I'm all for it. Campbell has been around. He's come up short in a couple world title fights. I think he's just one of those guys who will get really close but not quite get there."

3. RICHARD COMMEY, 29-3 (26 KOS), GHANA

"Solid guy. Got caught with a good shot from (Teofimo) Lopez. I know Richard a little bit; we work with the same promoter (Lou DiBella). I wish him all the best. He's a gentleman of the sport; I've got nothing bad to say about him. I'm just not sure how much he's got left in the tank."

2. DEVIN HANEY, 25-0 (15 KOS), U.S.

"Overrated, hasn't really done anything big. He really struggled to look good against (Yuriorkis) Gamboa, and [Gamboa is almost] 39 years of age. He's got talent and he's young, but I think a guy like myself, who's explosive and powerful and moves with angles, can beat him. But the young guys are here; the new wave is definitely here."

1. VASILIY LOMACHENKO, 14-2 (10 KOS), UKRAINE

"Lomachenko is still an all-time great; you can't take that away from him. Not sure about the excuse with the shoulder injury in the Lopez fight – that's on him. He's still a great, but I think his time has come. He's slowing up. I think his best bet is to move back down to 130. But if he wants to stay at lightweight, I'd love to fight him here at a packed stadium in Australia. He's still a legend of the sport and full respect to him; there's no bad blood."

C. TEOFIMO LOPEZ, 16-0 (12 KOS), U.S.

"He's the main guy now. It's crazy that just a year ago, we would never even think that he would be the unified champ. But look, he's done it and you can't take that away from him. You have to beat the man to become the man, and he beat Lomachenko. And now I want to fight the man to become the man as well. I'm his IBF mandatory, and I should become his WBO mandatory as well. We've already started some talks between my camp and his camp to make that megafight between us in Australia in front of fifty or sixty thousand people. I think my biggest asset against Lopez will be my endurance. In the championship rounds, I'll still be bouncing around. In the Lomachenko fight, he faded a bit in the second half. But full respect to Lopez. When he won that fight, I was happy for him."

SERGIO MARTINEZ: *GREATEST HITS*

MIKE EHRMANN

THE FORMER MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION FROM ARGENTINA LOOKS BACK AT A LEGACY STILL IN THE MAKING

By **Anson Wainwright**

Sergio Martinez's journey took him across an ocean and into his mid-30s before the southpaw with matinee idol looks was able to show everyone what he had long known: that he was one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world.

Martinez grew up in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and was the middle child of three. His mother, Susana, was a housewife and his father, Hugo, was a metalworker.

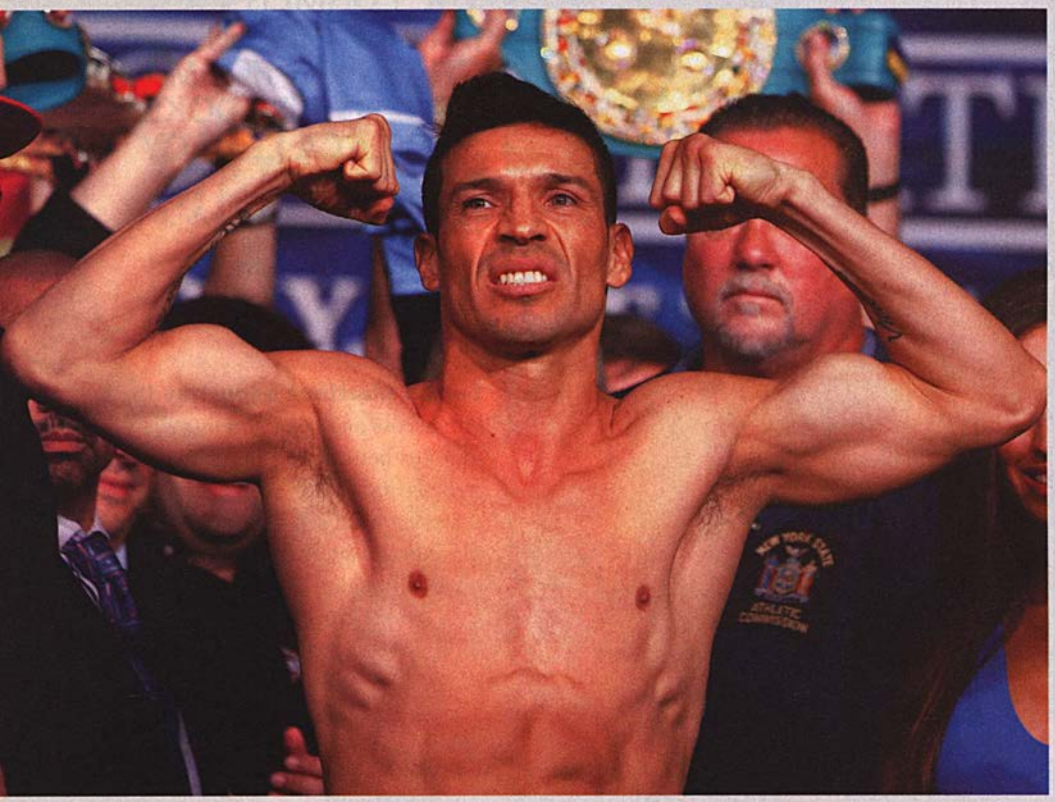
"We were a poor family, living in a very small house in Quilmes (about 11 miles from the capital city)," Martinez told The Ring through Oscar Zardain. "I left school at 14 because of the economic situation at home to help my father in his work.

"Boxing was always around my family. My uncle Rubén Paniagua had a boxing gym in Quilmes and he was a pro in the 1980s. We were good boxing fans, but I was playing soccer.

"At age 20, I started to box only to improve my physical condition. My first day at a boxing gym was May 2, 1995. I tried it once and I was hooked. I have not stopped ever since."

Martinez competed as an amateur at the 1997 World Championships in Budapest, Hungary, but lost his second bout to Adrian Diaconu, who would go on to briefly hold the WBC light heavyweight title. Martinez turned professional that same year.

The skilled boxer-puncher won 16 of his first 17 outings, the lone blemish being a draw in his third fight. He made his American debut against a young Antonio Margarito on the undercard of Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales in February 2000. Although Martinez was



Martinez had to be patient early in his professional career, but when the big moments came, he took full advantage.

stopped in seven rounds, it was a valuable learning curve for him.

"The Margarito fight was the key," he said. "This loss taught me that I was not ready to fight at the highest level and that I needed to improve a lot of things, like my physical condition, my team and also my management."

He regrouped and claimed the national welterweight title before he was prompted by the situation in Argentina to make a life-altering decision.

"In 2002, I decided to immigrate to Europe," he explained. "Argentina was suffering a terrible economic crisis, and I needed to work. I was hungry – the boxing was a separate thing. I moved to Spain because the language [was the same as in Argentina] and I started to work in gyms or as security in bars and discos."

Martinez won four low-key fights in Spain and was offered a fight against well-respected Brit Richard Williams in England. In successive fights, he upset Williams by unanimous decision, stopped Adrian Stone and then stopped Williams in a rematch. The wins should have set Martinez on the right path. Instead, he found himself returning to Spain and relative obscurity.

"Nobody wanted to fight me after the U.K. victories," he said. "I suffered this problem all my life. I am very grateful to Lou (DiBella, his promoter) and Sampson (Lewkowicz, his manager) for helping me in this part of my career; they put a lot of money and hopes on me."

Fighting on DiBella's cards, things began to thaw in 2008 when Martinez stopped Alex Bunema for the WBC interim junior middleweight title, but misfortune continued to plague the Argentine. Somehow the judges controversially robbed him against Kermit Cintron (D 12) in 2009. He then suffered further heartache in a majority decision loss to Paul Williams later that year.

Then came his big break. When Williams was unable to face Ring/WBC/WBO middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik, Martinez stepped into the breach. It was an opportunity "Maravilla" ("The Marvel") wasn't going to pass up, and he won a hard-fought unanimous decision.

"It was a dream come true," he said proudly. "To be lineal middleweight champion like Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Robinson or Carlos Monzón, a real legend in my country. Also, I was (eventually) No. 3 pound-for-pound after (Floyd) Mayweather and (Manny) Pacquiao. I entered into the history of boxing like a king."

Martinez went on to make six successful defenses of the 160-pound throne, including an unforgettable one-punch Knockout of the Year against Williams and a valiant final-round stand against Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., before injury and Father Time caught up with him and he yielded his position to Miguel Cotto in June 2014.

Martinez decided to retire from boxing but, like many before him, the lure of the sport proved too powerful for him to ignore. In August, the now-45-year-old returned, stopping journeyman Jose Miguel Fandino in seven rounds.

"[I want to] check my feelings in the ring and feel the punches again," Martinez told The Ring after making the decision to try a comeback. "Then we will see [what I can do].

"Boxing is my life. Everything was wrong in my last fight against Cotto: training camp, the injuries, my knee. Now I am feeling really good and my knees are better. All these years of rest were very good for my knees and elbows."

Martinez lives with his girlfriend in Madrid, Spain. He owns Maravilla Promotions and stays busy doing corporate motivational speeches and working on his stand-up comedy show.

Here's what he had to say about six of his most memorable nights in the ring:

ANTONIO MARGARITO

February 19, 2000, Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas • Titles: None

"Las Vegas is an amazing city, especially for a kid who has never been out of Argentina – except one time before in Hungary with the national amateur team. The first day was a shock. The night I fought Margarito, I did not think he had his gloves loaded. He was the better fighter that night and he was better-prepared than I was. I have no regrets, and it was early in my career; I have become a better fighter because of it. Just after the fight, an Argentine reporter from TV asked me about my thoughts and I told him, 'I will be back to Las Vegas better and stronger than tonight.' Twelve years later, I was there beating [Julio Cesar Chavez Jr.]. After the Margarito fight, I was sad, but of course I found a place in the middle of the crowd to see Morales-Barrera, one of the best fights in the history of boxing. Years after the fight, when I was based in the States, I found out that the purse of [the Margarito fight] was $25,000, but I received only $900. This is the perfect summary of the experience. The fight was a disaster. I had no team, I had no plan A or B … or Z. What happened had to happen; justice was done. It would have been unfair for me to beat Margarito – impossible and unfair."

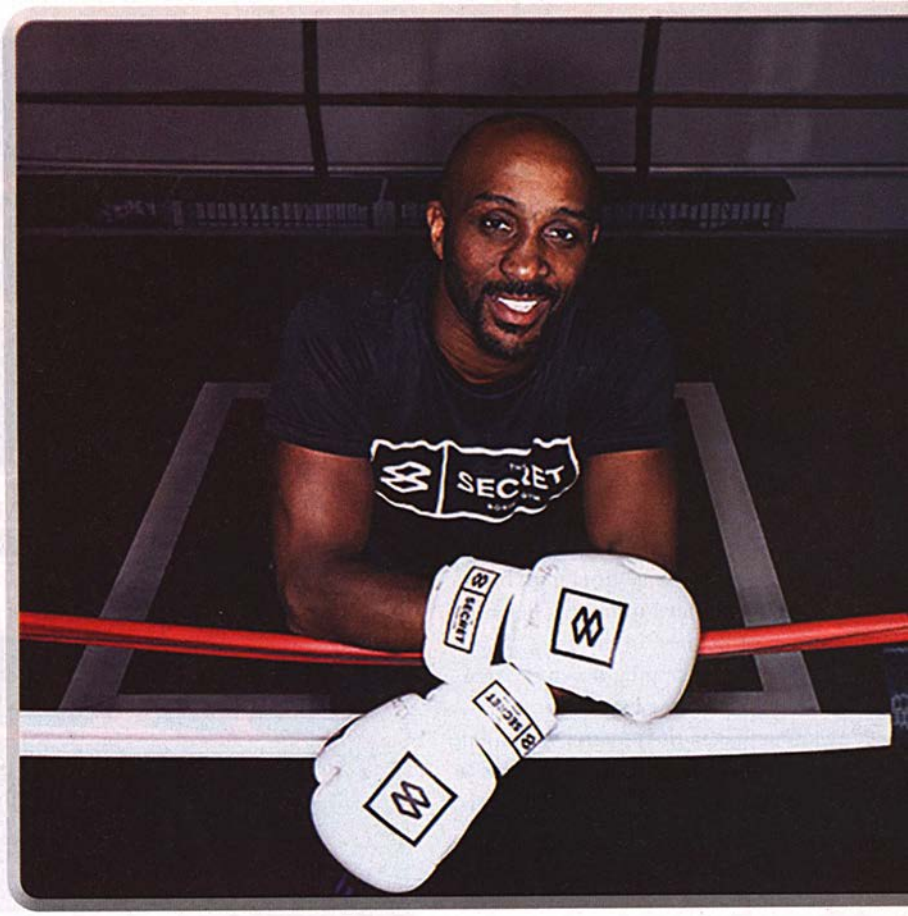
RESULT: MARGARITO TKO 7

RICHARD WILLIAMS 2

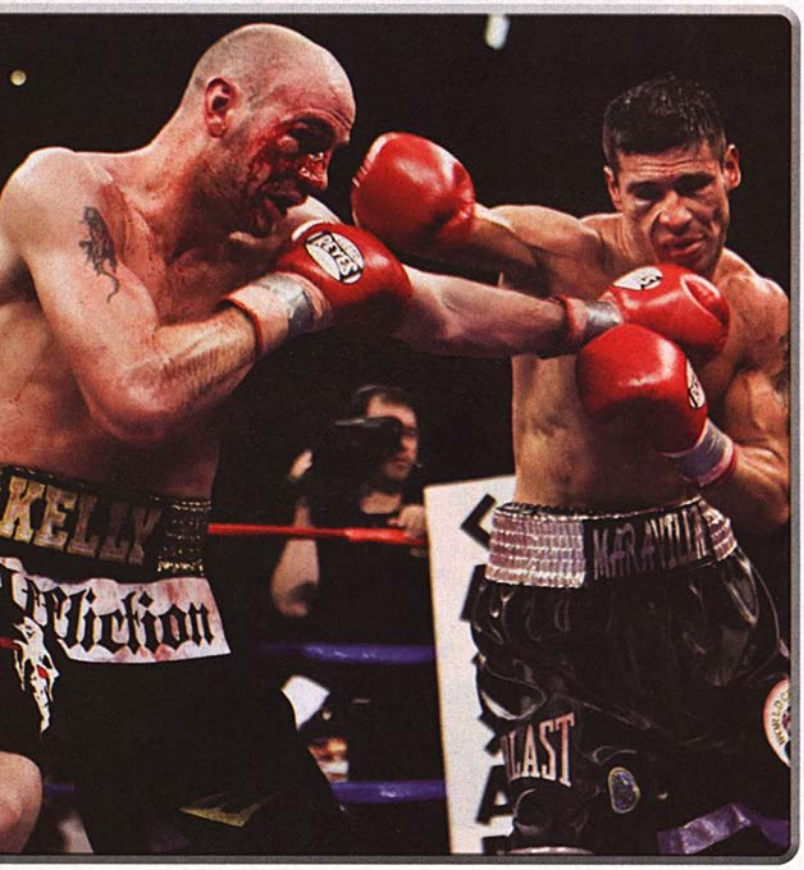
April 17, 2004, King's Hall, Belfast, Northern Ireland • Titles: None

"The most important victory was against Richard Williams. I was in a very bad moment – without money, without legal papers as an immigrant in Spain – and that victory showed me that I was ready for the big fights. I was fighting for my life and my future. The three fights [in England, versus Williams twice and Adrian Stone,] are my favorite fights and the most important part of my career. In the first Williams fight, he knocked me down, but my father was in the crowd; I saw him and I thought to myself, 'Get up. Your moment is now or never.' I knew Williams was defeated before starting [the second fight]. Taking this fight was a big mistake for his team; I was better than the first fight and I won easily. Williams was a great fighter, but after our first fight he was never the same again."

RESULT: MARTINEZ TKO 9



MARGARITO: ED MULHOLLAND/WIREIMAGE



KELLY PAVLIK

April 17, 2010, Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Titles: Ring/WBC/WBO middleweight

"I was not the favorite. Pavlik was a superstar and the lineal middleweight champion, and I am small for 160. The people started to know me after the first fight against Paul Williams, but mostly I was an unknown fighter. My initial idea was to win all the rounds, because I was the challenger. The fight was hard. He knocked me down in the seventh round and I could feel all his power; he was big and strong. I had to adapt my fight game to the knockdown and the cuts that he suffered. Thanks to my southpaw stance, my footwork and the strategy, I won that fight. It all changed around me. I was a champion before the fight at 154, but after the victory over Pavlik, I became a superstar. A lot of people and journalists started to ask, 'Who is Maravilla?' It was hard, because I am a quiet person, but I understood it was necessary to speak to the press, do TV interviews, media days and photo sessions for the business."

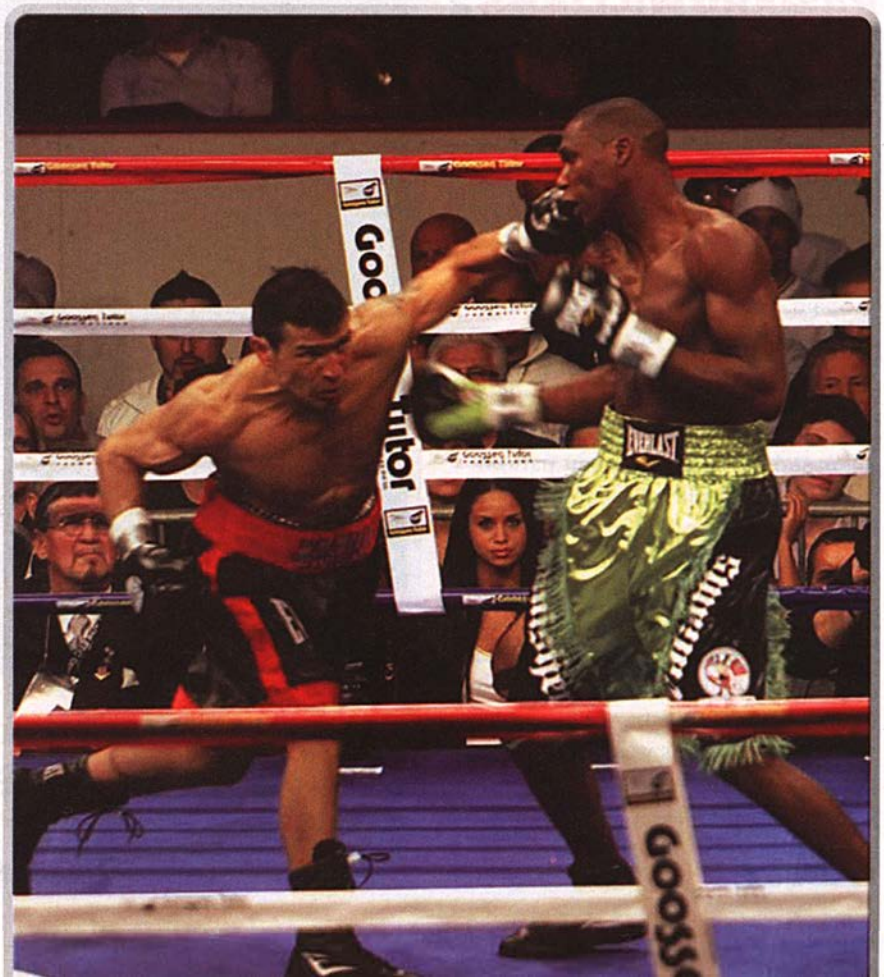
RESULT: MARTINEZ UD 12

PAUL WILLIAMS 2

November 20, 2010, Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Titles: Ring/WBC middleweight

"I was new on this level and Williams was my first serious test. I learned from that [first fight] how to fight against the top-class fighters. After the fight, I corrected some mistakes in my training camps. If you watch the second fight again, you can see that I threw and landed the same punch six times before the final one. Paul was a tough fighter with a tremendous iron chin, but he was not hard to hit; his defense was not the best in the game. It was just about chopping down the tree. I hurt him in the first fight and I knew that in the rematch I could do it again. Being objective, yes, this knockout was the most important punch of my career."

RESULT: MARTINEZ KO 2



JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ JR.

September 15, 2012, Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring/WBC middleweight

"Fight week and fight day were a dream come true, but the year-and-a-half before were a nightmare. I did not understand the situation, how the WBC took my belt in an office. I am very grateful to Lou and Sampson for the help that they gave me. I [recaptured the WBC title] that night not because I won 11½ rounds, I was the champion because I got up in the last round. I was aware. In fact, the first thing that I did was look to my corner and make a gesture to them to indicate that I was fine. The big problem was my knee; I had a lot of problems during the training camp, and after the knockdown I felt my knee was not good. I had to have surgery after the fight. It's the champion's way [to fight with injuries]. Boxing is the hardest sport. It's the hurt business. If you are not ready for this, look for another activity."

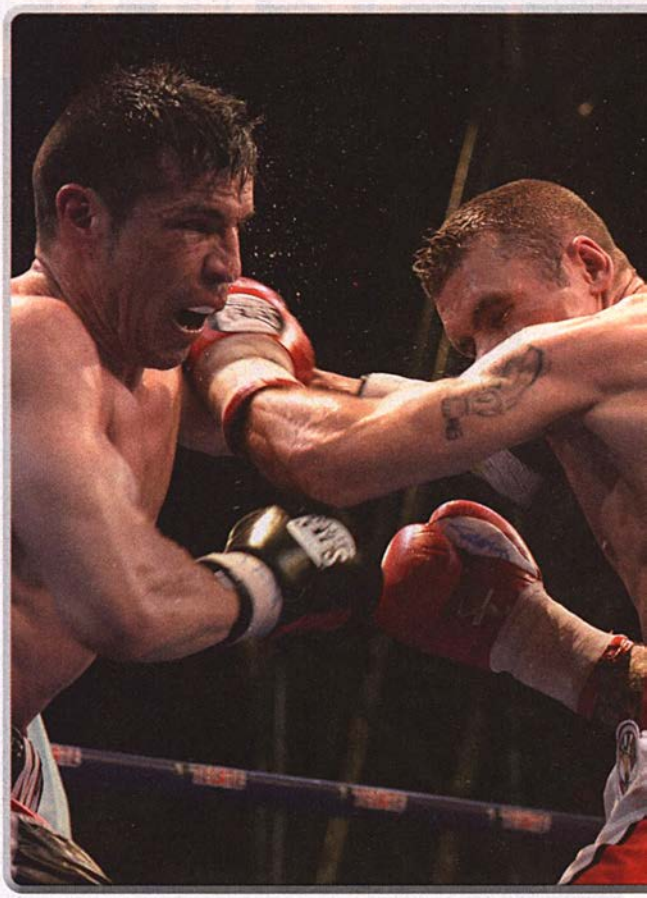
RESULT: MARTINEZ UD 12

MARTIN MURRAY

April 27, 2013, José Amalfitani Stadium, Buenos Aires • Titles: Ring/WBC middleweight

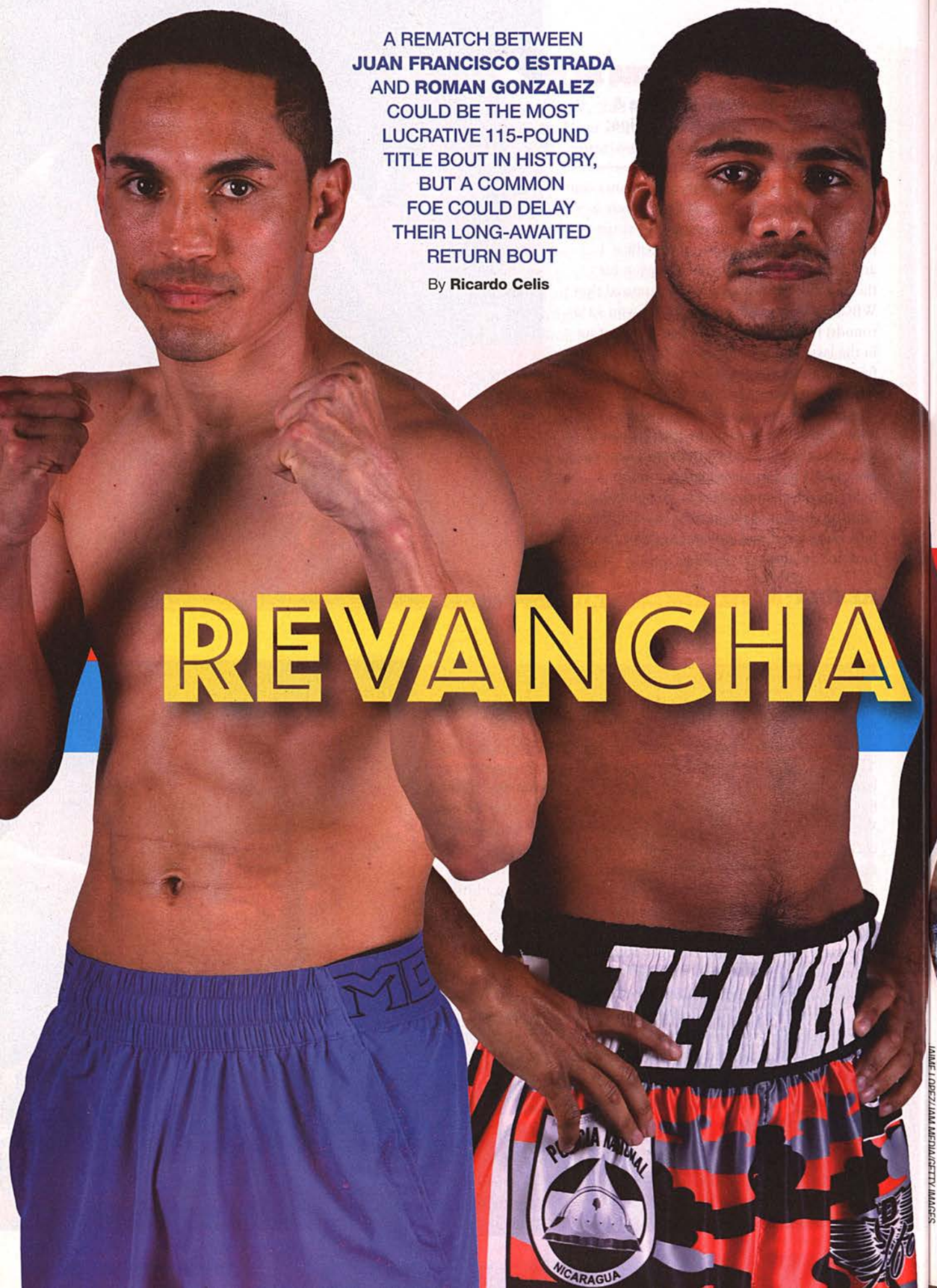
"The training camp was not the best, my knees were in a very bad condition and I think that we made a lot of mistakes for this fight – and the next (Cotto), too. I was very happy, very excited. We (Argentines) are crazy about sports, and all the people were cheering all the time. The real number of people was very close to 50,000, and the fight was broadcast on two public channels at the same time. The weather was not a problem; it was a little cold, but with this kind of crowd you are in a special atmosphere. Fighting in the middle of an electric storm was epic. I was in no position to clearly win the fight because of my injuries and training camp, and Murray was not ready to win a fight for the title in front of 50,000 fans. To be honest, I think that I won the first half of the fight and also the championship rounds. Martin did well, a very good competitive fight. He is strong and a very good fighter, but I still think that I was the fair winner. The key was the last two rounds, in my opinion."

RESULT: MARTINEZ UD 12



Oscar Zardain helped coordinate and translate this feature. The Ring appreciated his assistance. Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

CHAVEZ, JR.: JOHN GORZINSKI, MURRAY: MADHOWATA



A REMATCH BETWEEN **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** AND **ROMAN GONZALEZ** COULD BE THE MOST LUCRATIVE 115-POUND TITLE BOUT IN HISTORY, BUT A COMMON FOE COULD DELAY THEIR LONG-AWAITED RETURN BOUT

By **Ricardo Celis**

REVANCHA DEMORADA

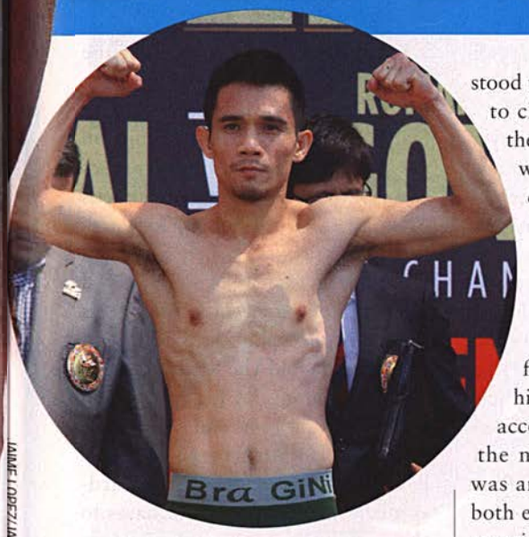
Juan Francisco Estrada, the reigning junior bantamweight champ known in the boxing world as "El Gallo," has lost only three times in a stellar 12-year career.

Juan Carlos Sanchez Jr. was the first pro to beat Estrada, via eight-round decision when both were still prospects in 2011. Future Hall of Famer Roman Gonzalez was the second man to beat "El Gallo" in an unforgettable junior flyweight title bout in 2012. Former pound-for-pound-rated Srisaket Sor Rungvisai was the last man to outpoint Estrada, who has never been stopped.

Estrada (41-3, 28 KOs) scored a 10th-round stoppage of Sanchez only seven months after losing to the future 115-pound beltholder. Against Sor Rungvisai, who bested him via hard-fought majority decision in February 2018, Estrada returned after a little more than a year to win the World Boxing Council 115-pound belt and earn the vacant Ring Magazine title with a unanimous decision over the feared Thai warrior.

Only one loss remains unchallenged. Avenging this one could make Estrada a legend, and he's very close to getting the opportunity, but another return bout could get in the way.

Before that roadblock is explained, let's revisit the evening Estrada announced his potential to be a truly special fighter: November 17, 2012. The Memorial Sports Arena in Los Angeles boomed with excitement that rainy night as two young fighters entered the ring. Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez was defending his World Boxing Association 108-pound title for the fifth time, his team behind him holding up his other belts collected at strawweight. On the opposing side stood the unheralded Estrada, looking to claim his first title. To Estrada, the title belts they held meant he was just a few steps away from claiming his own.



(Opposite page) Fans want to see Juan Francisco Estrada and Roman Gonzalez meet again, but Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (this page) wants his shot first.

When the bell finally sounded, Estrada launched fierce combinations to take the first three rounds. Gonzalez, being the more experienced fighter, knew when to conserve his energy and responded to hits accordingly. When reminiscing on the night, Gonzalez recounts, "It was an extremely difficult fight; we both exchanged really hard punches, especially counterpunching."

Estrada and Gonzalez traded destructive punches throughout the match, somehow managing to stay on their toes. After the eighth round, Estrada's stamina began to run out and his responses slowed down. Chocolatito finished strong and took the advantage in the last three rounds to win by unanimous decision. The sensational battle left its mark on the crowd of mostly Latino hardcore fight fans.

Estrada, only 22 at the time, was immediately ready for a second shot at a world title. Everyone in the arena that night was thinking the same thing: A rematch between these two would be epic.

But they would have to wait as the two took separate paths after 2012, both proving to be elite champions in the flyweight and junior bantamweight divisions in the years that followed.

Estrada upset Brian Viloria for the WBA and WBO flyweight titles just five months after the Gonzalez fight, scoring a split decision over the 2000 U.S. Olympian in Macau. He defended the unified belts five times between 2013 and 2015, including a decision over future 108-pound titleholder Milan Melindo and late-rounds stoppages of former champions Giovani Segura and Hernan Marquez. In 2016, Estrada vacated his 112-pound titles to campaign at junior bantamweight and in 2017, in the co-feature to Gonzalez's devastating rematch loss to Sor Rungvisai, he scored a razor-thin unanimous decision over Carlos Cuadras to earn a shot at the formidable champion from Thailand.

Gonzalez had won the Ring Magazine and WBC flyweight titles by stopping Japanese slugger Akira Yaegashi in 2014. He became Nicaragua's first four-division champion when he earned the WBC 115-pound belt with a unanimous

decision over Cuadras two years later, but back-to-back losses to Sor Rungvisai in 2017 prompted many fans to close the book on Chocolatito's stellar career. However, Gonzalez took some time off, fought a couple tune-up bouts and completely revamped his training camp before the start of the new decade. He proved that his punches are still some of the deadliest in the junior bantamweight division by overwhelming unbeaten Kal Yafai in nine rounds to claim the WBA title in February 2020.

Eight years after their first match, the Estrada-Gonzalez dream rematch finally looks on track to becoming a reality. They co-headlined a card held in Mexico City on October 23 to help set up what could be one of the most anticipated and lucrative sub-featherweight bouts in history.

Pound-for-pound star Estrada (right) got off the floor to punish Cuadras en route to an impressive stoppage.

Gonzalez put forth another vintage performance against former two-time title challenger Israel Gonzalez, soundly outworking his younger and much bigger opponent to a unanimous decision. His match over with, Chocolatito turned his attention to the main event of the Matchroom-Zanfer co-promotion, a rematch between Estrada and Cuadras.

Against Cuadras, Estrada showed that it takes more than a few hard punches to keep El Gallo down, as he had to rise from a third-round knockdown to eventually grind his fellow Mexican veteran to an 11th-round stoppage.

"The truth is that we were well-prepared," Estrada said after the fight. "I felt very strong. I was really surprised by the punch that dropped me in the third round. But thank God, I was able to keep on fighting and win by knockout."

The punishing technique that Gonzalez displayed and Estrada's dramatic victory (in what some called a Fight of the Year candidate) sent the boxing world into a frenzy on social media. Fans who had no idea who either was in 2012 were now clamoring for Estrada-Gonzalez 2.

When asked how their rematch might turn out, Gonzalez replied: "We're both definitely going to bring a lot more from the first fight. Not all fights are the same, but I really think that this will be a war."

Exciting battles between top-level flyweights and bantamweights are not uncommon, but it's rare when the little giants are well-paid for their blood, sweat and tears.

The three-fight series between Michael Carbajal and Humberto "La Chiquita" Gonzalez helped pave the road for lighter-weight stars to receive proper compensation. Their first fight in March 1993, aptly titled "La Explosion," created a rivalry and record paydays for the two junior flyweight champs.

Much like Gonzalez-Estrada I, spectators were left wanting more after Carbajal twice climbed off of the canvas to knock Gonzalez out cold in the seventh round of The Ring Magazine's Fight of the Year.

Because of the popularity of the matchup, Carbajal and Gonzalez became the first boxers under featherweight to make $1 million for a fight. The Hall of Famers set a standard for the paychecks of smaller fighters going forward. Estrada expressed his thoughts on the Gonzalez-Carbajal trilogy and the overlapping effect it has on his career. "At the end of the day, this is a business," he told The Ring. "Yes, this is a sport, but it is my life, my career. I obviously want to be paid well."

Money shouldn't be an obstacle. Estrada and Gonzalez bring hard-earned reputations and fan bases to their rematch. Their style clash is among the best that can be made in any weight class, Gonzalez with his rocket-fast punches and unmatched moment-to-moment strategy and Estrada's iron constitution and

stamina. Fans and networks will be willing to pay for it.

The rematch would also be a unification of two major world titles, which gives the bout extra status but also carries the obligations of the sanctioning organizations.

The WBC may insist that Estrada fight his mandatory challenger, Sor Rungvisai, before the Gonzalez rematch can be put together.

Before the Estrada-Cuadras rematch, Sor Rungvisai expressed his desire to fight the winner. A few weeks after the fight, the former champ demanded a rubber match with Estrada via an open letter shared with Ring Magazine contributor Anson Wainwright (and posted on RingTV.com):

I have heard people saying that Juan Francisco Estrada still wants to fight Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez next, and it is extremely frustrating for me.

I have been the mandatory challenger for this title for over a year now. It has been ordered for a long time by the WBC's Board of Governors that Estrada could have one more voluntary defense, which he had against Carlos Cuadras, then he had to fight me for his mandatory defense.

If Estrada and Chocolatito wanted to fight each other so much, they could have just done it in their last fight, but they chose not to. Now it is my right and my turn to fight for the title. I won't understand if they want to dodge the rules. It is not fair and not respectful for me and the Thai people who support me.

I have given both Chocolatito and Estrada the opportunities at my title whenever it was ordered for me to do so. I expect them to do the same thing for me. I respect both Estrada and Chocolatito as great fighters in the ring.

However, they need to do the right thing outside the ring to earn the full respect. To have Estrada vs. Chocolatito next is not right. It is not fair! I know Estrada is a great human being, and I trust that he will do the right thing. Chocolatito as well, he can wait now and his turn will come.

Estrada is aware that Sor Rungvisai is the WBC's No. 1 contender but says he was under the impression that the Cuadras rematch was organized (with the cooperation of the Mexico-based sanctioning organization) to line up the rematch that he and the fans desire most – the one with Gonzalez.

"I understood that the Cuadras fight was done precisely for that reason," he said. "After Chocolatito won and myself having won, the rematch was supposed to happen next year, but it seems that yesterday or the day before a story came out that the World Boxing Council is forcing me to fight against Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, because he is the number one challenger.

"So, we don't know what to do at the moment. We don't know if the fight is made against Roman Gonzalez or against Sor Rungvisai; that is in discussion for the moment."

Estrada is blunt about which direction he wants to go in.

"For me, Roman Gonzalez and I are a much more interesting rematch. I think he feels the same way. I'm not interested in a third fight against Sor Rungvisai; I am more interested in a fight against Roman."

Most fans agree with Estrada, but the WBC will have the final say.

As expected, the legendary Gonzalez (right) had way too much for Israel Gonzalez and won convincingly on points.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE

REGIS PROGRAIS EXPERIENCED LOSS, CHANGE AND BIRTH DURING A WHIRLWIND 12 MONTHS THAT HAS REINVIGORATED THE JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT STANDOUT

By **Donald McRae**

Regis Prograis drove through the darkness of Texas on Halloween night. One hundred and seventy miles separate San Antonio from Katy, on the outskirts of Houston, and he had two-and-a-half hours to think as his car sped through a quiet Saturday night. The ghosts of the past year retreated still further as Prograis neared home.

He had been out of the ring for a year and five days, but his return after such a long break saw him defeat the previously unbeaten Juan Heraldez in a third-round stoppage at the Alamodome. Prograis had to curb his desire to get home even faster. His wife, Raquel, was due to give birth to their third child – and second daughter – that night.

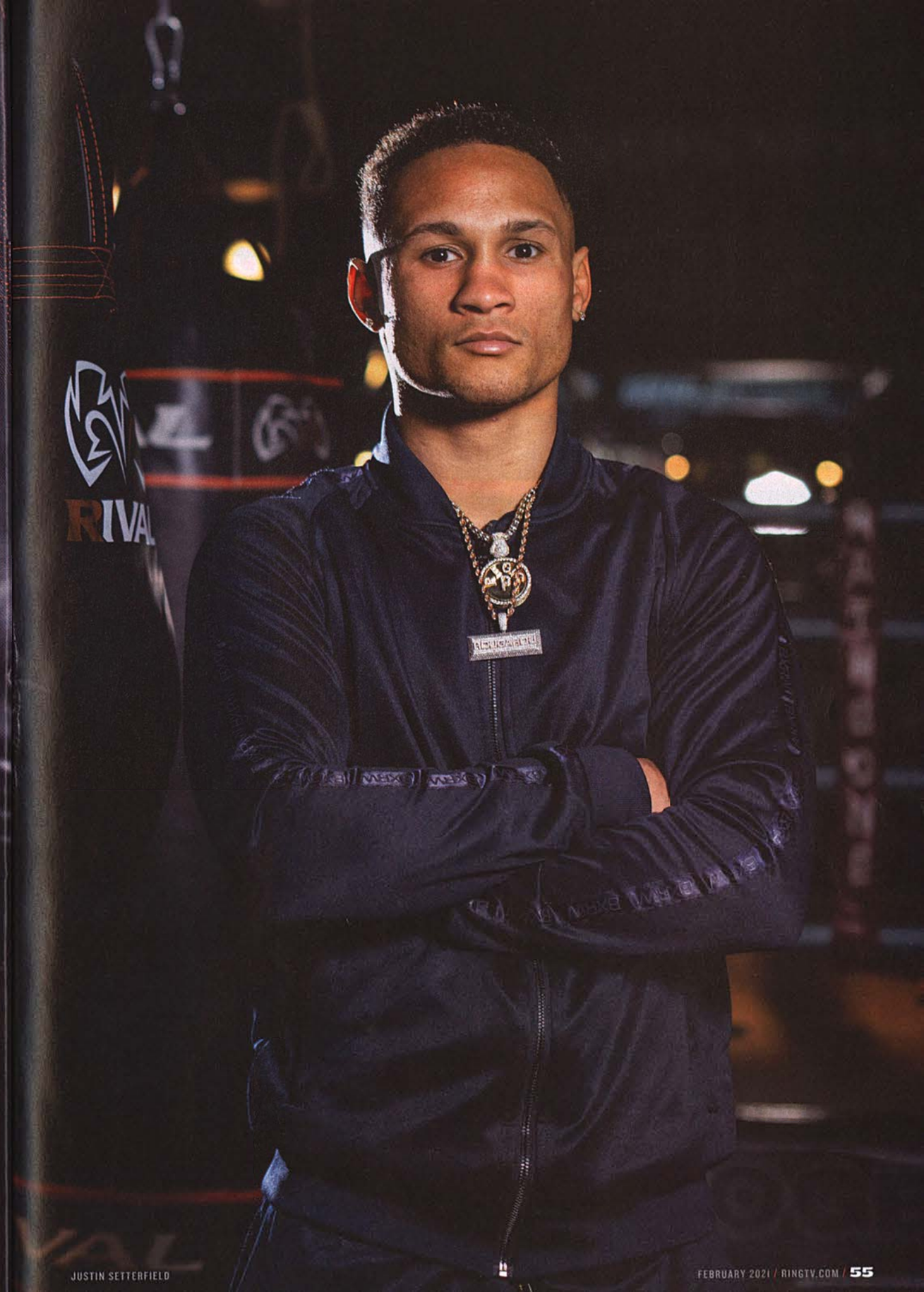
Prograis made it home in time. The following morning he sent me a message on WhatsApp: "Raquel is having contractions now. Baby is probably gonna come today."

Later that Sunday, November 1, their little girl Khalanni arrived safely in a home birth. "It was so good, man," Prograis says now. "While I was in the bubble in San Antonio, I was kind of nervous that she was going to have the baby. But when I had left home, my wife was all business. Raquel said she's going to handle it and that's what she did. She and the baby waited for me to get back, and so everything was wonderful. Everything was perfect."

It was different from the aftermath

ESTHER LIN/SHOWTIME

"Rougarou" is back in the win column after a yearlong layoff and will now target some of the best fighters in the world.



JUSTIN SETTERFIELD

Juan Heraldez was no match for a red-hot Prograis and was halted in three rounds.

of his last fight in London, on October 26, 2019, when Prograis and Josh Taylor had waged an epic title-unification battle that also marked the final of the World Boxing Super Series junior welterweight competition. Prograis believed that he had won, but the majority decision, the Ring Magazine junior welterweight title, WBA and IBF belts and the World Boxing Super Series Muhammad Ali Trophy were all awarded to Taylor.

That night, after the best fight I had seen all year, I tried to find Prograis. There were rumors that he and Taylor would both spend the night in a London hospital. It had been an absorbing and brutal fight, full of highly technical skill and punches of sickening force. The contest was so ferocious, and so even, it felt as if I had watched it from a dizzying ledge.

Prograis was moving in defeat. "It was a close fight and he was at home," he said of Taylor. "But the better man won tonight, so that's cool. I give no excuses. Thank y'all, England, and I'll be back."

Taylor looked in worse shape with his right eye sealed shut, and Prograis said, "I definitely enjoyed it. It was one hell of a fight."

Away from the ring, Raquel and her mother-in-law stood in a corner of Prograis' locker room. They were crying. It seemed invasive to ask any questions. I headed to the back of the arena and waited. The Prograis family soon arrived. There was still no sign of the fighter.

Then, slowly, the ambulance rolled toward us. Its blue light flashed in the dark.

I looked at Bobby Benton, who had, as usual, been in Prograis' corner. "Bobby?" I said, his name sounding like an anxious question.

"I'll tell Regis you came to see him," the trainer said quietly. Two more cars followed the ambulance. Prograis' family and his cornermen climbed into the cars.

I watched the small convoy, led by the ambulance carrying Prograis, as it snaked away. All the earlier drama and exhilaration had gone. I stood alone on the sidewalk.

The ambulance gathered speed, its blue light still flashing. But there was no screaming siren – just a haunting silence as I watched it disappear into the night.

It was a relief to hear from Prograis the next morning. He had not stayed in the hospital long and he sent me a detailed and thoughtful message. The doctors had given him the all-clear, and he offered an incisive analysis of the little mistakes that cost him a victory.

Now, a year later, we are back in a hospital parking lot. Prograis talks to me on Zoom from the front seat of his car while he waits for Raquel to have a routine medical check. Having been in camp for so long – after an earlier fight against Maurice Hooker had been canceled because of COVID-19

– Prograis can relax and reflect on a surreal year. His recent experience in a boxing bubble captured the strangeness of 2020.

Prograis believes that the unusual backdrop was a significant factor in him not making weight against Heraldez. When he stepped on the scales, he was 1.6 pounds over the 140 limit and, rather than trying to boil down in weight, he paid Heraldez compensation. "You don't want to give excuses," Prograis says, "but I didn't have to make the weight the whole year, so that had an effect. And it's so weird in the bubble. On Tuesday, we couldn't leave our rooms at all. Usually Tuesday is the big day where I lose three or four pounds running with a sauna suit on. If I'd had Tuesday and Wednesday as a gym day, I would have been all right. But the bubble messed me up.

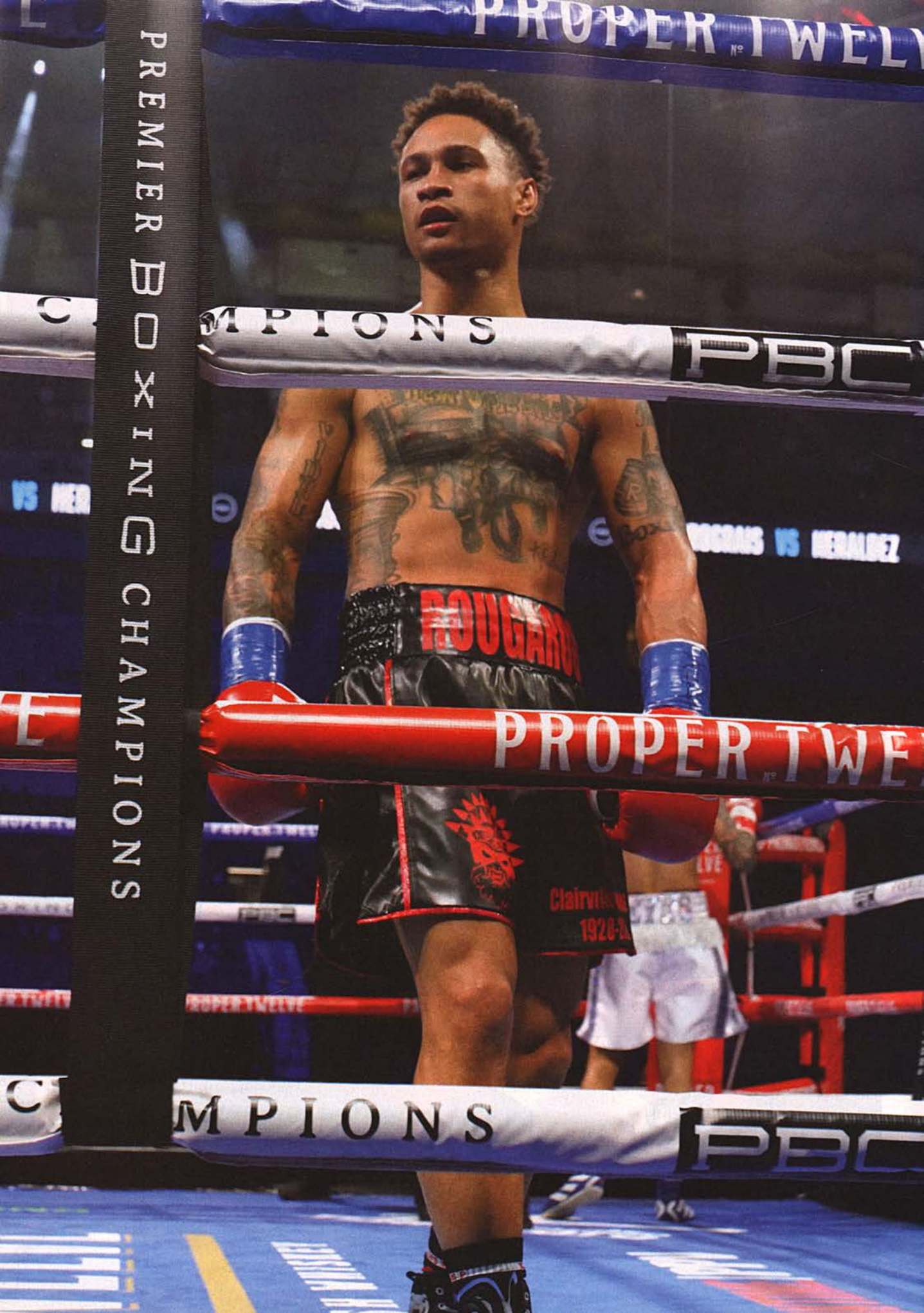
"I'd been out of the ring a whole year, so I just couldn't wait to get back. It was a great night of boxing (headlined by Gervonta Davis and his stunning knockout of Leo Santa Cruz) and I performed my best. I'd been in training camp almost a year, and it all came out in that particular fight. I almost felt sorry for him."

Prograis was, in his own words, "loose and relaxed," and in the third he caught Heraldez with a barrage of heavy blows. The Floyd Mayweather-promoted fighter buckled beneath Prograis' power.

While a crowd of 9,000 was allowed into an arena that can hold 72,000 people, in boxing's first major card with spectators since the start of the pandemic, social distancing made it another bizarre experience. "They had to space people out, and so it was kind of empty. It wasn't a regular fight where the place is packed. There were people way up at the top and I couldn't understand that there were guys in sci-fi movie suits (sanitizing the ring between fights). We know we didn't have corona because we came from the bubble and wore masks all week. It was so strange."

There was a more beautiful strangeness when, after his victory, Prograis was joined by his 7-year-old son, Ray. The boxer was shocked. "It's crazy how he snuck in the ring to be with me. He was with my mom but ran off and said, 'I want to be with my daddy.' He jumped over the barricade and came to find me. My mom was pissed off because everyone was looking for him, but they soon saw he was with me. I said to him, 'You're not supposed to be here because of the

Prograis and Taylor duked it out in a Fight of the Year candidate that saw both men elevate their reputations.


PREMIER BOXING CHAMPIONS
PBC
PROPER TWELVE

bubble.' I had to sneak him back to my mom."

Prograis pauses when I ask if Ray had been upset in October 2019 in London when, at ringside, he saw his dad endure a savage night. "I don't know. I remember right after the Taylor fight my son got in the ring and said: 'Why didn't you duck?' I laughed and said, 'I ducked a little bit.' But I went to the hospital that night because I thought about my son and Patrick Day (the Long Island fighter who tragically lost his life after a grueling bout in Chicago a week earlier). My head was hurting. I'd never had a headache after a fight, but I'd never gotten into a war before. So I didn't know how I was supposed to feel after a fight like that.

"Patrick Day had his funeral that same day. I decided to get checked because Patrick was on my mind and I didn't want to take any chances for my family. I was like, 'Yeah, I'm going to the hospital,' man. By the time I got there, my headache had gone."

Considering the grave dangers of boxing, would he try to steer little Ray away from becoming a boxer himself? Prograis smiles wryly. "It's crazy, but I've got my son boxing right now. He's in the gym boxing my nephew. But I really wouldn't want him to be a fighter, because the sport is too hard. The things we go through are so brutal, I wouldn't want my kid to feel it. It feels like you're dying cutting weight, and I push my body past my limits in training almost every single day. I wouldn't want my kid to do that. But he might have it in his blood, so if he wants to do it, then, yeah, I'd let him."

How long did it take him to get over his first defeat? "The next month was real hard, but after that I was walking my son to school (in Los Angeles) and going to the beach. So it wasn't that bad. I still feel like I won, but also it was just Taylor's night. He had a lot of passion because his girlfriend's daddy died just before the fight. Shane McGuigan (who was then Taylor's trainer) has also lost his sister (to cancer). They had a lot going on and it was his country and his night.

"I didn't feel like I was going to lose the fight, but earlier that day I had a vision in my head that I'm not getting the Muhammad Ali Trophy. You don't want to tell your coach stuff like that, so I didn't tell nobody. But I still came out of it real well. My standing went up because it was a great fight."

It has been a tumultuous year for Prograis. He lost his grandfather and, as he says, "We were real close. He always came to the fights, him and my grandma, and they ragged me all the time. They used to call me Joe Louis, and everywhere he went he showed this boxing picture of me he kept in his wallet. He would say 'This is my grandson' and really promote me. That's why I dedicated that last fight to my grandpa. His name was Clareville Martinez, but we called him Clay. He was a great man, and he and my grandma were married 60 years."

Prograis and his wife are currently looking after his grandmother, and he stresses how the whole family is thriving in Katy after a testing 12 months dealing with defeat, death and COVID. "It's been tough, man, but I'm very optimistic about life. Around June, we moved back to Texas from L.A., then my grandpa died, some friends stole money from me and there was a lot going on. Even in the midst of all that, I know I have a good life and I kept training. And moving back to Texas was the right thing.

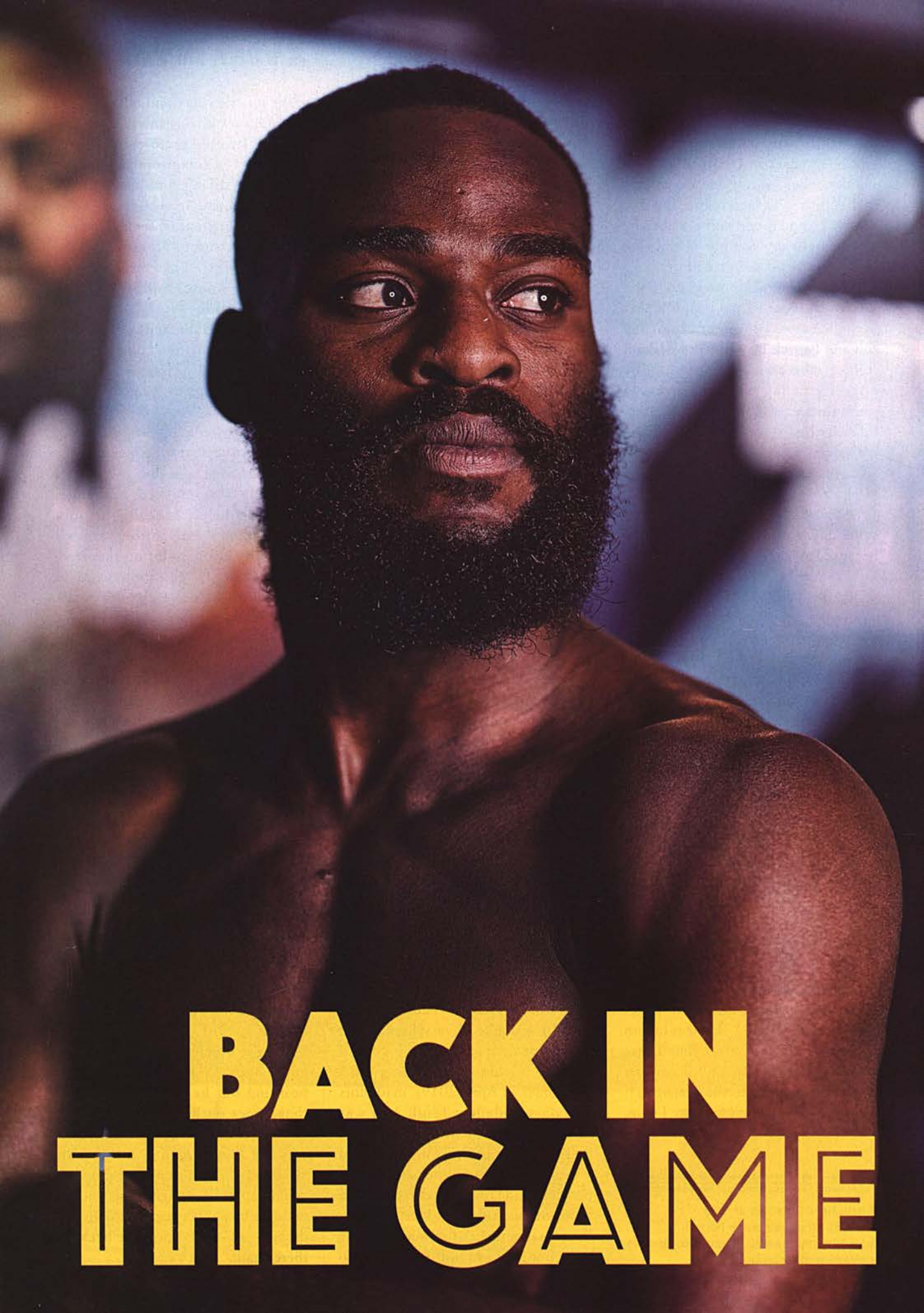
"I still love L.A. When I first got there, I was like, 'Everything about this city is me; it's what I love.' I'd won the world title (becoming WBA beltholder in April 2019), made lots of money and moved to L.A. It was like I was on vacation, because I had the finest lifestyle in L.A. I had a brand new house and always had people staying over. My dad came one time and he said, 'This lifestyle has a lot of bad energy.' Too many people were hanging around. But I used to wake up every day and tell my wife, 'I'm not ever leaving this place. I love it here.' I would go to the gym, but after that I'm going spearfishing, I'm going free diving, I'm going to the beach, I'm going to have fun.

"It's so different in Texas. Katy's a small town west of Houston, on the outskirts. Where I live there are only a hundred houses and it's a gated community. I love it, as we've got a lot of land, a lake and a boat. I go to the gym and then come straight home. I eat, take a nap, see my kids and then train again. It's good for me as a fighter."

Prograis owes a lot to Lou DiBella, the promoter "who believed in me before anyone else did" – but this year has also marked a change. He left DiBella, amicably, to join Al Haymon's PBC stable, and he is already contemplating lucrative future fights. "I definitely want to fight Adrien Broner. He's been in jail, but I think it will happen one day. My division is hot right now (with Taylor and Jose Ramirez holding the four main belts between them). I want my belt back and I definitely want a Taylor rematch down the line, because that's the only blemish on my record. He might move up soon to a division where you got Bud Crawford. A couple more fights at 140 and I will be moving up, too. Me and Crawford have had words over the years. He knows it's not personal, but hopefully we can make those fights happen."

Before he moves to welterweight, there is a possibility that Prograis could fight Teofimo Lopez at 140. After his comprehensive defeat of Vasiliy Lomachenko in October, Lopez could soon vacate his lightweight belts and move up. "It might happen," Prograis says before pointing out he was not surprised that Lopez outboxed Lomachenko. "I thought he was going to win. He was the bigger man and his skills are good. So that's another one that could happen. But, right now, I'm just taking a break. It's been a real up and down year – but I'm right back up there again."

When he's finished at 140 pounds, Prograis says he will take his impressive arsenal to the welterweight division.



BACK IN THE GAME

AFTER 400 DAYS WITHOUT A FIGHT, **JOSHUA BUATSI** FINALLY STEPPED OUT OF HIS BUBBLE AND INTO THE LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE RACE

By **Paul Zanon**

"Before a fight, I'll be saying, 'I'm tough; I'm prepared to go into deep waters' and this, that and the other. But here I was, now faced with a situation where I was being forced to call upon my promise."

Digging in deep, Joshua Buatsi reflected on his clash against durable Croatian Marko Calic, which extended his unbeaten professional record to 13-0. Following a successful amateur career and busy start in the pro ranks, the 27-year-old light heavyweight was relieved to beat Calic after a long absence from the ring.

"That was my attitude at that point," said Buatsi. "I was thinking, 'OK, now you need to show a side to your game that you've never shown or been forced to show before.'"

The affable Londoner's journey started in Accra, Ghana, where he lived until the age of 9 before moving to Britain in 2002. After first donning the gloves at 15, Buatsi soon started to create an impressive trail of amateur silverware and in less than two years gained first place in the 2010 England Youth National Championships in the 85 kg (187 pounds) category. Dropping down to 81 kg (179 pounds) the year after, he repeated his success, which won him a place on the Ghanaian national squad. The 2012 Olympics were now in his sights.

Buatsi reached the finals of the Ghana National Selection Tournament, losing to his more experienced foe, Emmanuel Agyei Anim. The opportunity to represent his birth country was still there for the taking, but Buatsi's wisdom or perhaps inexperience told him to hold his fire until the next Olympics in 2016. Over the next four years, the South Londoner won gold twice in the English National Championships and bronze in the European Championships, then sealed his amateur swan song with bronze for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. The following year, Buatsi graduated with a degree in business management and sports science from St. Mary's University in London and embarked on his professional boxing career.

Leaving a destructive trail of 12 wins with 10 stoppages over the 26 months since making his debut in July 2017, Buatsi was on course for climbing up the mandatory ladder for world title contention. In 2019 alone, he stopped Liam Conroy in three rounds at the Copper Box Arena in London to be crowned British light heavyweight champion, then a couple of months later fought on the Anthony Joshua-Andy Ruiz Jr. undercard at Madison Square Garden, stopping Marco Antonio Periban in the fourth round for a minor WBA trinket. Three months later he defended the title at the O2 Arena in London against Ryan Ford, stopping his opponent in the seventh session at a vibrant 20,000-seater arena. And then the lockdowns started.

Buatsi discussed his frustrations at not being able to fight in more than 13 months: "It's been difficult. It's been very up and down. Within that time, I'd prepared for two fights that didn't happen. One because I felt ill before the fight and the other because we went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. Getting ready for fights which don't materialize is very frustrating, especially after I'd put in a lot of work. However, one thing that did stay constant is that I remained in the gym all the time.

"I remained positive throughout lockdown, though, and I was always grateful for my health. When the date of October 4th was finally locked in for this fight after changing a number of times, I was glad to get that focus again after 400 days out of the ring. I was so glad to be back."

Buatsi explained the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted him: "On both personal and boxing levels, there wasn't a great deal of adjustments for me to make, because I do a lot on my own, in the sense that I'm not usually around large crowds of people. Boxing is an individual sport, and that was emphasized a lot more when it came to running, cycling and stuff like that. What [the] coronavirus did do was put more emphasis on the people I was close to already, like family and friends. We had more time to do things together that we normally wouldn't have the chance to do on a regular basis, making up for lost times and rebuilding and strengthening relationships that sometimes take the hit because of the nature of my job. If I'm honest with you, the pandemic handed me a positive side to my life."

Buatsi explained his experience in dealing with the difference in dynamics: "The training leading up to it was tricky, because we now had to work within government guidelines, being in a bubble, facemasks, visors, etc. That was different. Although I got the work done, it was hard. Some of the people I was working with didn't have fights scheduled, so how motivated were they in training or sparring? That was questionable, understandably. For me, I was like, 'OK, I'm going into a fight,' which is very normal. But in this situation, I hadn't boxed in over a year. This is the longest I've ever had since I've started boxing, even as an amateur, where I haven't had a fight. ... That was a very long time to have off.

"However, going into the fight, I didn't overthink it. I'm not the type of person who kept thinking the inactivity was going to affect me. All I kept thinking was that I wanted to get into that 12-round fight with Calic."

Buatsi is polite, endearing and a very good fighter. He has a large fan-following each time he steps through the ropes. How did fighting in an empty arena affect him? "It's one thing watching the fights on television at home on your sofa, seeing boxers in front of an empty arena, listening to

Buatsi claimed Olympic bronze and now seeks professional gold.

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the commentary, then it's another when you're actually in the situation in the ring and you have to deal with that new environment.

"I'll be honest, though. It wasn't difficult at all. All I needed to know was that my opponent was coming to beat me. That was my biggest motivation and driver. Once I knew that he would be a genuine test and had a good pedigree, I was extremely motivated. It would have been nice to hear the cheers, don't get me wrong, but I was so fixed on the job at hand."

Calic's pedigree certainly shone when the two finally met behind closed doors on October 4, 2020, at the Marshall Arena in Milton Keynes, U.K. With more than 190 amateur fights to his name and bringing an unbeaten professional record of 11-0 to the table, Calic, the visibly bigger fighter with a longer reach, claimed he was going to burst the Buatsi bubble. Buatsi explained the strategy going into the fight: "The game plan was to win every round. Round 1, I wanted to find my range and see which shots I could be more successful with."

Despite being ahead on the scorecards after two rounds, Buatsi was in a close fight against the rangy, switch-hitting Croatian. Come Round 3, Buatsi found himself in unfamiliar territory after being on the receiving end of a destructive straight right hand to his cheekbone, causing a large swelling directly below his eye. The London favorite recalled the moment of impact: "I had my game plan, but unfortunately, as everyone saw, it went out of the window when my eye blew up. When that happened, I was like, 'OK, now you're in a situation where you have to forget game plans, forget saying you're a tough guy' and this and that. At that point, you are in the situation and you need to deal with it.

"Round 1 was a 'feel out' round. I saw what I was dealing with. Round 2, despite the commentary saying my nose was bleeding, that wasn't the case and I was in control. Round 3, he had a good round. I hurt him just before he caught me in the eye. I forced him in his corner, landed a good one-two. The jab was just to disguise the right. He then ducked a bit low to regroup from that, and as I went in again, that's when he landed the right hand, just under my eye.

After absorbing a direct hit, Buatsi turned the tables and found the punches required to halt Calic in the seventh round.

"Next round, I thought, 'OK, I gave him Round 3, based on that shot.' Then I questioned myself again. 'Your vision is compromised, and you're in that situation you talked about before. Now you have to deliver and step up. You are more than prepared for this, and do what it takes to win.' That was my mindset.

"Everyone keeps talking about ring rust, but it was nothing to do with that. The way I reacted was my way of saying, 'My vision has been compromised, but I'm not hurt.' It's not like I'd been buzzed and I was disorientated. Not at all. I wanted to show that my feet were still good, grounded, firm and ready to deliver solid punches. That was my reaction."

In the fifth session, Buatsi shifted up a couple of gears and caught Calic with a massive looping right hand to the jaw, which buckled his legs. Buatsi recalled, "I knew by Round 5 that somebody was definitely going to go in this fight. I knew by the end of Round 4 that it wasn't going to be me. I was putting my punches together nicely, but I also started to notice he was getting more tired, and for the next rounds I also spotted that I was getting off my stool a bit earlier than him and each round he was taking a bit longer. I knew he was feeling the pace at that point, whereas I felt fit and was recovering quickly. I was eager to get back out there, at this intensity, because I knew he wouldn't be able to keep up for much longer.

"In the sixth round, I'd seen how he had absorbed the shots to the head quite well, so I decided to mix up my shots and see what his body was like and started throwing in the hooks. You know what, though, full credit to him. He never showed he was hurt in the ring when I was unloading and I was standing right in front of him. After each shot, he just stood there and didn't move. However, I could tell he was there for the taking."

The unbeaten Buatsi has nothing but respect for the fighter who gave him his toughest test as a professional.

Buatsi sealed the fight in the seventh round in destructive fashion. "I threw a big right hand, the same shot I'd been landing with clean in the previous two rounds. The last big one which landed caused the damage. That's when his corner held up the towel.

"When the fight was stopped, he said, 'My jaw is broken,' and I said, 'You're a champion. I don't know how you stayed in there. I kept landing clean and you never showed it.' He's a nice guy. After the fight, I went to his changing room and then we kept in contact on Instagram. He told me he suffered a few fractures to the jaw, but credit to him. He came and brought the best out of me that I needed to be and showed a new side of me to those looking at the fight."

In recent years, a number of boxers have suffered horrific eye-socket bone injuries – Kell Brook a case in point against Errol Spence Jr. and Gennadiy Golovkin. Buatsi clarified the severity of the injury he sustained in the fight: "It was purely a swelling which came down within about three days and turned into a black eye. I'm grateful for that. I'm not going to lie, though. Based on the compromised vision, that became my toughest fight as a professional."

Buatsi's status as the best light heavyweight in Britain was further cemented by the victory over Calic. However, fellow hard-hitting countrymen Callum Johnson and Anthony Yarde are hot on his heels, having both challenged for world honors in recent fights. A clash with either could make for explosive viewing. Buatsi humbly gave his take: "They're both good fighters. Johnson fought (Artur) Beterbiev and dropped him, and Yarde put on a great performance against (Sergey) Kovalev and just fell short. It was very unfortunate, but Yarde gave a great performance and I commend him and give him a lot of credit for that fight. If I had to fight either of them, I would probably say Yarde, because it's a fight that seems to be drawing more attention, but the Johnson one would also be good. I don't really have a big preference, to be honest."

Now boasting a 13-fight unbeaten record with a high knockout ratio, Buatsi has already had the likes of Dmitry Bivol expressing an interest in locking horns. How prepared is Team Buatsi to mix with the light heavyweight elite? "I can openly say I think we're a few fights away from there. We've spoken about the 'in-between fights,' that gray area between this level and their level. We need to cover those fights first, but it's a level we're not a million miles from. We are heading in the right direction and need to keep pressing forward positively."

Buatsi's positive mindset goes beyond his own personal space. As a 2016 Olympic medalist looking back at when the coronavirus struck and announcements were made early in 2020 that the Tokyo Games would be deferred, Buatsi offered his advice to future Olympians: "When the news hit, I knew this was going to be very, very challenging times for them. I spoke to some of the guys on the team, and it's very hard for them. I said, 'Look, it's a world event that's happened and we need to embrace that. The show must go on. There's no point in complaining. Make the best of the situation.' They've dug in deep and got on with it. The important part is staying active and continuing to live the life. Never to lose that focus.

"It's not just the Olympians, though. Like with the professional game, you have a team of people around you. The trainers particularly are affected and everyone who is part of the team who help each athlete achieve their goals. They need more recognition."

With an indestructible air of optimism around him, what can we expect from Joshua Buatsi in 2021 and beyond? "There's a lot more to come. That's why I'm always so hopeful, because I feel that boxing hasn't seen everything I can do just yet. You'll keep seeing different sides to me, and I'm here on this journey to get to the top. Definitely."

THE CONTENDER INSIDE

JAMES SCOTT WAS SEEN AS ONE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS OF HIS DAY AND A POTENTIAL WORLD CHAMPION, EVEN THOUGH HIS FIGHTS TOOK PLACE BEHIND PRISON WALLS

By **Tris Dixon**

"I always took my wife to the fights and they'd sit together and I didn't tell her who he was," smiled New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame President Henry Hascup. "She would talk to him, and afterward she'd say, 'Oh, what a nice guy.' And I'd say, 'Yes, he is.'"

The man was in his late 60s and he'd spent nearly half of his life in prison for murder.

The former prizefighter had been out for many years and was struggling with dementia, but he had one of the most extraordinary stories in a sport that is crammed with them.

"I wouldn't call James a bad dude," says the man's sister, Lori Scott-Pickens. "Had James had different kinds of advocates, he wouldn't have got in trouble in the '50s and '60s, and I think systemic racism played a part in that. He was like a surrogate parent because he was the oldest [of 12]. He was very honest. He had leadership. He was a philosopher. He was a good and kind dude, so the bad things we heard at the different times he was involved in the criminal justice system, it seemed contrary to what we saw as somebody who had a leadership role in our family... But there's that side we'd hear about and not witness that existed out there. I didn't think he was a bad guy, but I'm his sister." »

Scott (left) battles future Hall of Famer Dwight Muhammad Qawi (then named Dwight Braxton) in Rahway State Prison.

THE CONTENDER INSIDE

James Scott was brought up in Newark and soon found trouble.

He picked up arrests and served time for truancy and robbery, learning to fight behind bars. On his release from one prison, he moved south to Florida to focus on boxing. He trained at the same 5th Street Gym as Muhammad Ali, was promoted by Chris Dundee, and Hank Kaplan was his publicist.

But he didn't make progress just because he had a good team. He could really fight.

Scott was matched hard early. He beat 8-0 John Johnson in his debut. In his fourth fight, he stopped Baby Boy Rolle in eight rounds. Just two outings earlier, Rolle had taken future WBC light heavyweight titleholder John Conteh the distance.

Scott was 26, and after he beat Ray Anderson (UD 10) in April 1974, people started to take note. Three years earlier, Anderson had gone the distance with legendary light heavyweight champ Bob Foster in a 15-round title bout. With Scott's win over Anderson, Dundee promptly offered Foster $100,000 to put his belt on the line against his six-fight novice.

Instead, Foster, in the final stretch of his Hall of Fame career, defended his title a final time and announced his retirement later that year. But Scott pushed forward.

In February 1975, now sporting his trademark shaven skull, Scott outpointed Jesse Burnett, one of that extraordinary crop of 1970s light heavyweight dangermen, and went back up to New Jersey. Then trouble struck.

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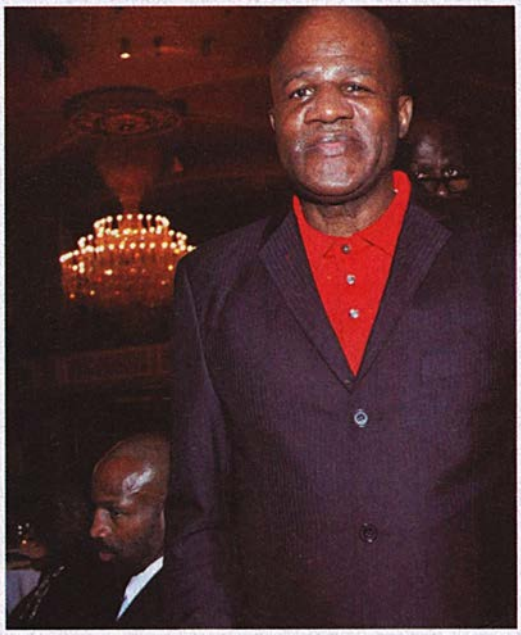
Apparently, Scott was set to fight Conteh for the WBC belt and was just days from announcing the contest.

On May 18, 1975, there was a drug deal, an armed robbery, and a 25-year-old man died in Newark. Scott was imprisoned.

But behind the walls, prisoner No. 57735 did three things.

He trained like a man possessed, he learned and read everything he could get his hands on and he spearheaded an unlikely boxing program.

Then Rahway prison worked on getting Scott some activity to reignite the burning embers of his pro career. After three years of inactivity, in 1978, Scott was allowed to face Diego Roberson and Fred Brown "inside," but his victories did not draw much attention.



All told, Scott spent a major portion of his lifetime behind bars.

However, promoter Murad Muhammad got wind of events and things changed irrevocably.

He envisaged a story. He got Eddie Gregory, then ranked No. 3 by the WBC and No. 1 by the WBA, to fight behind the walls at Rahway. Not only that, he got HBO – then a fledgling network – to come in and film it.

It wasn't a particularly moral tale and it's unlikely it would be told at all today, but welcome to the boxing landscape.

More than 1,000 Rahway inmates watched on closed-circuit TV, and paying fans were allowed into the prison gym to watch.

"I didn't have to take it, but since I'm a fighter, I wasn't going to back down or run from anybody," recalled Eddie, who later changed his name from Gregory to Mustafa Muhammad. "He had fought and beat a lot of good guys. I wasn't going to turn my back. If he says he wants to fight me and I accept the challenge, let's fight. For James, the whole key was condition. That was the key, because all he could do was train. He didn't have to do anything else; we all had distractions."

Eddie was referring to wine, women and song. Scott didn't have to concern himself with any of those. Conversely, he built a reputation as "Superman" by doing 2,000 sit-ups and 1,000 push-ups a day and running laps for the full hour he was allowed in the yard.

James's decision win over future world champion Gregory was the biggest news in boxing in October 1978.

The late Harold Lederman, who'd later work as HBO's unofficial judge, scored the fight as a ringside official and years on admitted he was blown away by what he'd seen.

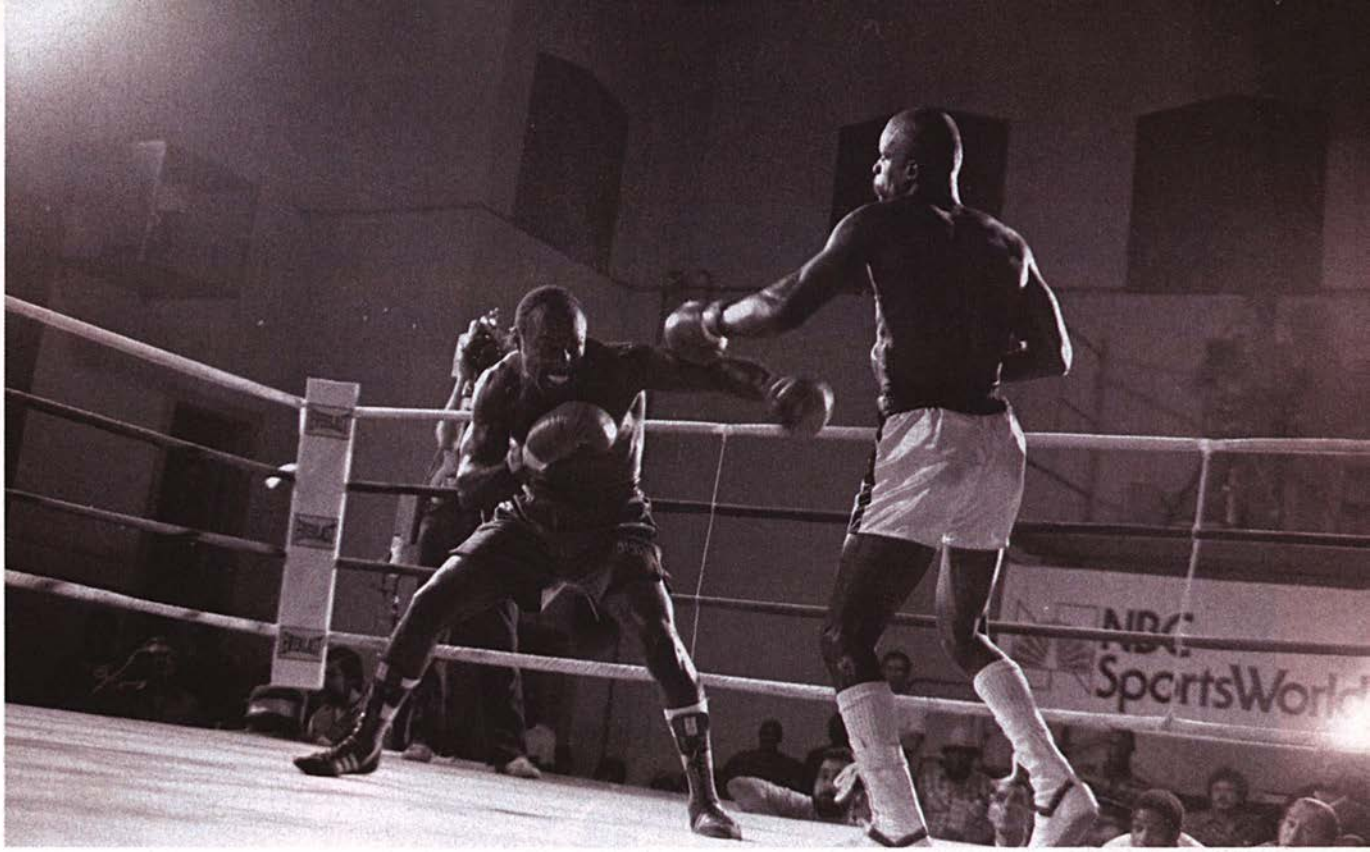
"On that day, I thought James Scott was the greatest light heavyweight I ever saw in my life," raved Harold in a 2014 interview. "That's how great he was."

Lederman placed him above the likes of Foster and Archie Moore based on that performance while trainer Gil Clancy likened Scott to a 175-pound Henry Armstrong.

"He thanked me for giving him the opportunity," said Eddie. "One thing about James is he was always thankful to me for giving him the opportunity."

Scott may have been under the radar for many before the Gregory win, but the secret was out.

He was the cover story of Britain's trade magazine Boxing News, which ran the headline "Convict Eyes Title Dream" when he defeated another leading contender in New Jersey's respected Richie Kates, stopping him in the 10th and final round on



NBC. "Everyone out there in the light heavyweight ranks is frightened to death of me," charged Scott. "I would be if I had to fight an animal as beautiful, tough and fast as I am."

"It was a fight I shouldn't have lost," reflected Kates, who ironically had a job trying to rehabilitate inmates. "I guess in some ways, even though I worked in the prison system for quite a while, the intimidation of being in prison threw me off. I wanted to fight a different fight. He was strong, very aggressive, and he wanted it."

Scott fought again four months later and Britain's Bunny Johnson was his visitor.

"Bunny Does a Seven Stretch," read one creative headline after Johnson's seventh-round loss.

Momentum was Scott's. His story had gone international and so had the boxing program's reputation.

There was a change of venue in the next bout when Scott stopped Ennio Commeti on a cut outdoors in the prison's exercise yard.

Dr. Ferdie Pacheco was a fixture in Scott's corner team and the winner was now in a habit of calling out the champions, WBC ruler Matthew Saad Muhammad and WBA king Victor Galindez.

He became prolific at challenging the top dogs, writing to boxing magazines – on both sides of the Atlantic – to make sure his voice was heard.

"We were putting out World Boxing and International Boxing in Long Island and James would occasionally call collect and speak to us," recalled boxing journalist Steve Farhood, who back then was four decades away from being inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. "We accepted the charges because, let's face it, how many fighters were calling us from prison? It was pretty unique access to a top guy. What stands out most about those phone calls, and I'm not exaggerating this, is he would literally send us to the dictionary – he would use language and vocabulary that we wouldn't understand – and we were trained journalists. Looking back, in retrospect, I find that fascinating that this man was so intelligent and so learned along with probably being the No. 1 light heavyweight in the world."

In one open letter to the likes of Mike Rossman, Saad Muhammad, Yaqui Lopez and Marvin Johnson, Scott wrote, "Gentlemen, we all know that I am a prisoner. However, the issue at hand is can I fight, or not.

Scott abandoned his habitual busy style in an attempt to outbox Qawi.

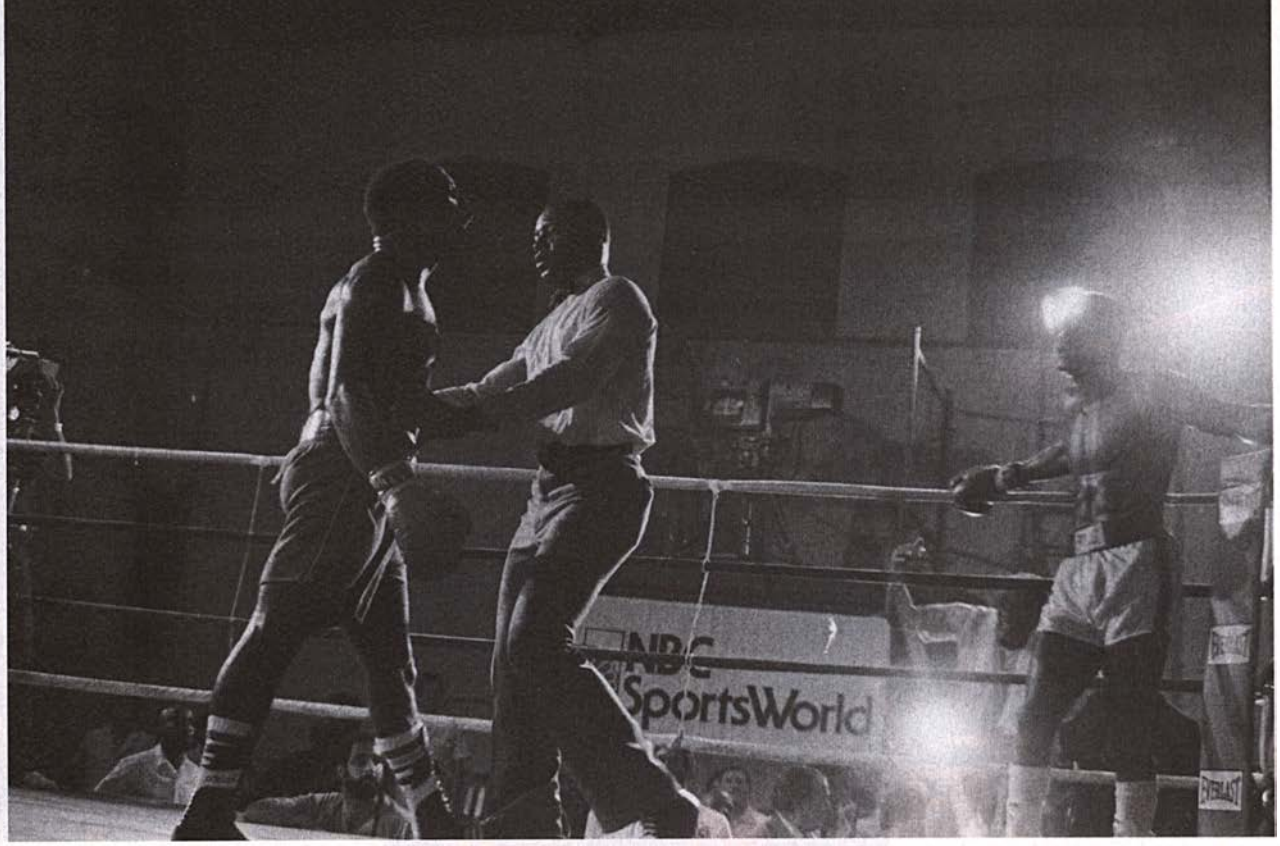
Judge my ability as a fighter. After all, these are the credentials you all know me by.

"I have fought and beat five men who have fought for the title. How long shall we prolong this thing? No one in the light heavyweight division can beat me, and I'm the only one in the top ten who is undefeated after fighting world class opponents. I am ready for a title shot – WBA or WBC."

He signed off, "Great Scott, The Uncrowned Champ."

"I'd read about the prison fights and heard about them and it seemed like he was the best in prison, but I wasn't in prison," said Marvin Johnson, who'd win a world title three times. "I thought I was the best fighter out here and I thought I was doing well and beating everyone in my weight class and I considered myself the best."

A clear Scott victory over decent New Orleans contender Jerry Celestine followed, and then former world title challenger Lopez, ranked No. 1 by the WBA, accepted the Rahway gauntlet in December 1979.



Qawi defeated Scott by decision in the latter's final professional bout.

In the pre-fight buildup, Scott said: "He won't escape. I'm going to be the first man in captivity wearing a world boxing crown."

He was obsessed.

"It was certainly the most unique venue I ever worked in in 42 years," said Farhood. "I lived driving distance from Rahway and I had a vision of what Rahway was like because it was not just a prison, it was a maximum-security prison. Television doesn't do it justice. It was like nothing else I'd ever been at, and it was very eerie and very scary. The whole atmosphere of being in a prison just lent itself to the myth of James Scott, because after a couple of fights on television, he was viewed as a superman. What does he have to do but sit-ups and push-ups? This is his life. To an extent, that myth was true."

Scott defeated Lopez by decision. But away from the ring, there was chaos. Scott's lawyer was trying to move him to a minimum-security prison so he could box outside the walls on day release. James was also appealing his sentence, and it was never entirely clear whether he had 20, 30 or 40 years left. There was also trouble in promotional paradise. Scott had retired and unretired and he'd fallen out with promoter Muhammad, who claimed exclusive promotional rights at Rahway.

"Scott says he's unhappy with the treatment he's received from the promoter and doesn't want to fight for him again," said Boxing News.

"He's getting on in years," assessed one report of Scott. "Some feel his resolve and incentive could be eroded by disappointments, with years of incarceration ahead of him."

Mysteriously, the WBA, which at one time ranked Scott, had dropped him from its ratings, saying it hadn't realized he was doing time (the WBC had never rated him).

"I think they should have given him a shot," said Kates. "It didn't work out, but they should have given him a shot and seen what happened."

And from amidst the turmoil came Scott's first defeat when Philadelphia light heavyweight contender Jerry Martin beat him on a bill promoted by Don King.

It was a grueling Sunday afternoon war in a sweltering prison gymnasium, and Martin won a split decision.

Martin's promoter, Russell Peltz, remembered the bout as one of his career highlights decades later.

"Jerry lived up to his nickname, 'The Bull,'" said Peltz. "He dropped him in the first two rounds and when he couldn't drop him in the third, Scott held his hand up as if he'd won that round because he didn't get knocked down. You knew then the fight was over, that Jerry had won."

"He's a damned good fighter, and God bless him," lamented a sporting Scott.

And that was the first nail in the Scott fighting coffin.

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The next nail came when he was found guilty for the murder of Everett Russ (previously the jury had been hung on the murder charge). Parole? Minimum security? Boxing? It was all gone.

The crux of the case was that Scott had killed Russ to cover up a drug deal gone bad.

Russ' body was dumped a block from the scene of the robbery.

The "smoking gun" came in the form of Edgar Barcliff, an off-duty corrections officer. He heard a gunshot, saw a man get into the passenger seat of a blue Chevy that

was blocking his vehicle and then speed off.

He saw Russ' body on the curb, drove after the car and, when he came close, took down the license plate number.

Barcliff then flagged down a nearby cop and told him what he'd seen.

Turned out it was Scott's car. Police later seized it and found a bullet similar to the ones used to kill Russ, who had been shot in the head, heart and shoulder. Ballistics showed the bullets in Russ and the bullets in the car had been fired by the same gun, too. Furthermore, a worker at a local seat-covering business for cars said he repaired the seats in Scott's vehicle after the murder.

Scott argued he wouldn't have got caught up in a comparatively small-time robbery that scored a few hundred dollars in drugs and cash when he was about to net $100,000 for a purse against Conteh.

Faced with the evidence, Scott later admitted to the crime but said a confession had been forced from him. He alleged his wife had been slapped around by the authorities. "I signed a statement because they were going to lock my wife up," he insisted. "The statement was a lie. I took a polygraph test."

An eight-day trial, with four white and eight black jurors, found Scott guilty unanimously in just four hours.

Then came years of steadfast denials.

One newspaper predicted: "Scott's boxing career can be considered at an end."

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Still, it wasn't over. There were appeals, and 15 months later, Scott, now in his mid-30s, faced Lee Royster, who had held him to a draw in 1974. Scott stopped his old foe in seven rounds in Rahway.

The end came in Scott's next fight, however, when Dwight Braxton – later Dwight Muhammad Qawi – defeated Scott on points.

Earlier in his life, Braxton had been in the same Rahway prison boxing program as Scott while doing time for armed robbery, and Dwight claimed Scott still owed him $400 for sparring.

James blamed the outcome on his strategy. He tried to outbox the shorter man and said he paid the price for transforming from volume-puncher to boxer.

"Much of the steam of the James Scott story was dissipating by the time he got to Qawi," stated Larry Hazzard, who refereed the bout. "He had got years added on to his sentence, the likelihood of him fighting for a title was quickly going away, and that kind of marked the end of the James Scott era. That was a sad thing for him. He never got a chance to redeem himself after that fight."

Scott was convinced they'd thrown away the key.

The boxing was over and he became just another convict.

"He did have this defeatist feeling that he was not going to be paroled, ever," his sister admitted.

In 2003, more than 20 years later, he'd thrust himself through numerous academic programs and was sharp and intelligent. But he bore scars from a lifetime in jail across his face and neck. His name and reputation had made him a target for young hoodlums hoping to climb the food chain.

"In the fight game," he said, when asked whether he was still in touch with anyone in boxing, "when they finish with you, they finish with you."

He could still boast of doing 40-50 push-ups in a set into his 50s but didn't expect to see the free world again.

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A couple of years later, he was released. It was 2005 and riding the bus was no longer 12 cents, but $1.50. Everything had moved on.

"When James came out, his parole officer was a wonderful guy and he held James's hand and worked with him to gain and maintain stability on the outside," said Scott-Pickens. "James required a lot of hand-holding. He was very institutionalized and he initially went back to Trenton, where he'd lived for a while as an adult."

Back in Trenton, James returned to boxing. Fighting brothers Sammy and Barry Goss allowed him to coach at their Goss & Goss Boxing Club.

"He was great with the kids," said Sammy.

And as he toiled to adjust to the outside world, James was remembered on a gala night when he was inducted into the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame.

"People questioned me a little bit, but the guy paid his debt to society," said NJBHOF president Henry Hascup of the decision to induct the former convict. "We'd put in Rubin Carter a couple of years before that, plus he was working with kids.

"When I first started seeing James around the fights, I knew he wasn't the healthiest person around. He didn't have that energy anymore. He was laid-back and his speech was a little slower."

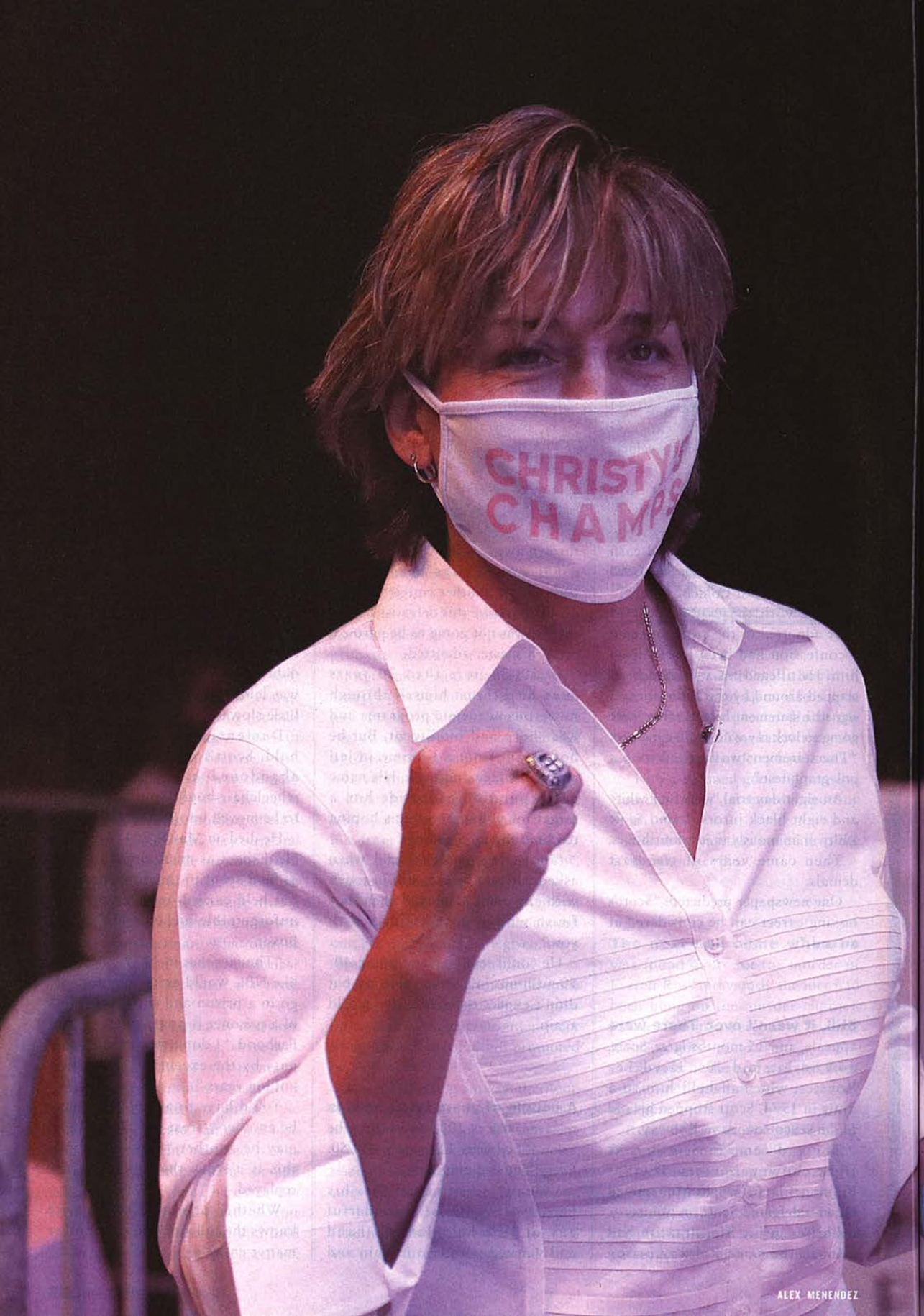
Dementia started to take hold. Scott's short-term memory abandoned him. He was then wheelchair-bound, muted and had to be moved into a nursing home.

He died on May 8, 2018, aged 70. He'd spent as much time in prison as he'd spent in the outside world, but he'd carved out a unique and unforgettable niche as The Prison Boxer.

"The fact that in 1979 a network like NBC would agree to repeatedly go in a prison and show the fights of a prisoner is pretty unique," said Farhood. "I don't think that would pass by the executives today in a million years."

You'd have to agree. There may be another "Great Scott" and there may be another "Superman," but this is a story that will never be replayed.

Whether or not Hascup's wife knows the full story now is another matter entirely.



ALEX MENENDEZ

THE MARVELOUS TWO

CHRISTY MARTIN'S WELL-DESERVED INDUCTION INTO THE INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME WILL ALSO BE A REUNION OF SORTS

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

It had already been the most memorable year of Christy Martin's life, but 1996 was about to get crazier.

The 27-year-old was already the talk of the boxing world after a bloody six-round war with Deirdre Gogarty on the Mike Tyson-Frank Bruno undercard in Las Vegas, subsequently becoming the first female boxer to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated magazine. Then the call came in for Martin to be the Grand Marshal of the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Parade of Champions in Canastota, New York.

But Martin wasn't interested.

"I said, 'No way,'" laughed Martin. "You don't understand; those guys hate women's boxing and they're real fighters, those legends and old-timers. Who wants to go someplace where you're not wanted?"

The Hall wanted Martin, though, and after getting a call back a couple days later, she agreed. And she loved it, being around the history of the sport she loved while mingling with the icons who, despite her fears, accepted her as one of their own.

"It was amazing to be there with those guys," she said. "They took me in like a daughter or granddaughter."

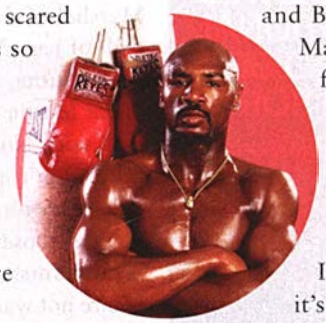
There was just one problem. Marvin

Alberto Palmetta celebrates with show promoter Christy Martin after defeating Tre'Sean Wiggins.

Hagler was there for the induction weekend, and Martin was terrified of The Marvelous One.

"I was, 'Oh my god, oh my god, this is Marvin Hagler,'" she laughs. "And I don't think he realized it, but if he walked in the room, I went out of the room because I was so intimidated by him and scared to death of him. I was so in awe of him."

Ultimately, though, it was like one of the middleweight great's title defenses, where he cornered his opponent and they had nowhere to run.



Marvelous Marvin Hagler

"At the end of the weekend, we're in a line, waiting to get introduced, so here comes Marvin Hagler," said Martin. "I can't move."

Hagler walked up to Martin and had one sentence for her:

"You have a really good left hook."

Twenty-four years later, you can hear the enthusiasm in Martin's voice as she tells that story.

"That's the kind of respect and love I have for boxing, for the Hall of Fame, for the legends."

In 2021, she'll join them, not as a Grand Marshal, but as one of three women who make up the first class of female boxers to be inducted into the IBHOF, along with Lucia Rijker and Barbara Buttrick. To see Martin going into the Hall first was a no-brainer, but it's also something "The Coal Miner's Daughter" still hasn't truly come to grips with.

"I don't even know if I have words for it, but it's hard for me to accept, because for 20 years, Jim Martin beat me down mentally and emotionally about everything," said Martin of her ex-husband, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for attempted second-degree murder. Christy Martin survived that 2010 attack, but the scars remain.

"Being on the cover of Sports Illustrated, fighting on all those Tyson cards and all the really cool things I did throughout my career, he always managed to beat me down and basically take credit for it and that it was him and what he did to make it happen," she said. "So, in some ways, it (the Hall of Fame induction) is still hard for me to accept. I loved what I did and I loved my job, and trust and believe, if I could do it right now, I would be in the gym training and still doing it."

She's not lying. But Martin, who has since remarried to a former opponent, Lisa Holewyne, is still active in the sport as the head of Christy Martin Promotions, and the 52-year-old has not lost an ounce of love for boxing. In fact, get her talking about the sweet science and she can go on and on. Ask her about her 49-7-3 (32 KOs) career, and she's way humbler than she should be.

ALEX MENENDEZ

"I just happened to be in the boxing gym in Daytona Beach," said Martin of the early days in her boxing career and how she got her big break. "Jesse Robinson, who trained fighters for Don King at the time, saw me spar. And I had my hair tucked up under my headgear, and he said, 'Who's that guy?' (laughs) And somebody said, 'That's Christy.' From that point on, I formed a relationship with Jesse, and he said, 'I gotta get you to King.' That was around the time Mike (Tyson) was coming out of prison, and he got me to King. I guess the rest is history. I got an awesome break. But I was ready to take advantage of that break. I trained hard and I ate, drank, slept boxing."

King, obviously impressed, put Martin on Tyson undercards and she became a star.

"I was the appetizer and Tyson was coming along as the main course," she said. "I got everybody warmed up and ready to go. I guess I was bringing something to DKP and King kept putting me out there. He put me on the biggest shows and he paid me really great. I also think I could fight a little bit. (laughs) I loved it."

The fans loved her right back, and for a while, no one could stop the West Virginia native, who started her career 36-1-2 before an upset 1998 loss to Sumya Anani. But even that defeat didn't slow down the Martin Express, with one of the highlights being a 2001 win over Kathy Collins on the Felix Trinidad-William Joppy undercard at New York City's Madison Square Garden.

It was a hard-fought victory, and as Team Martin celebrated back in their hotel room, the winning fighter had a question:

"Wow, did anybody remember to get my check?"

Martin laughs now about forgetting to pick up her $250,000.

"It wasn't about the money to me," she said. "It was another opportunity to fight in the Garden, which was awesome, and I'm fighting a New Yorker in the Garden and it was Kathy Collins, who was very well respected. It was a tough fight, and it was a great payday, but it wasn't about the payday. It was about making a statement that I'm the best woman fighter out here."

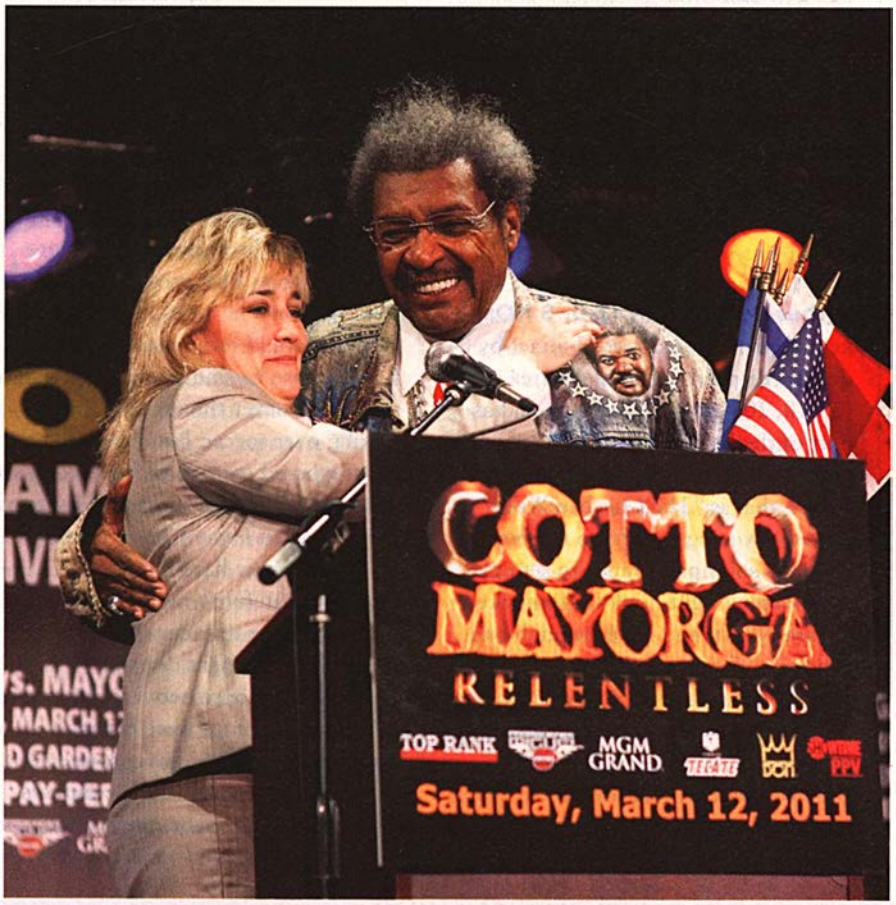
That night, and on a lot of other nights over the years, she was.

Of course, there were disappointments, like subsequent losses to Laila Ali and Holly Holm, as well as the superfight with Rijker never coming off after Rijker was forced out of their 2005 bout due to injury. But by that time, Martin had achieved what she wanted the first time she decided to put on the gloves. It wasn't about big paydays, legit world championships or a place in the Hall of Fame. All of those things weren't even available to women at the time, leaving Martin with a simple goal.

"I simply wanted to be a fighter," she said. "I just wanted to fit in. I didn't want everybody to say, 'Oh, wow, Christy is a good woman fighter.' I wanted them to say, 'Wow, Christy's a good fighter. She could hook off a jab, she knows how to throw a hook to the body, bring it back to the head. She's got good skills.' When I started, I didn't even know if a woman had ever boxed professionally before. You have to realize I'm from a small town in southern West Virginia. Boxing was not a major sport, locally. I didn't even know where a boxing gym was. Of course, I watched on TV some with my dad, but there was no goal other than I want people to walk away from the fight thinking that I was a good fighter."

Marvelous Marvin Hagler approved. Now Christy Martin is joining him in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Martin credits Don King with giving her the platform to display her talents and earn big money.



WORLD BEAT

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

Custio Clayton will now have to wait for another opportunity to make history. Going up against Sergey Lipinets (16-1-1, 12 KOs) for the interim IBF welterweight belt, Clayton (18-0-1, 12 KOs) aimed to take another step toward becoming the first Black fighter from Nova Scotia to win a world title since George Dixon in 1890. Unfortunately, Clayton had to settle for a majority draw in the Showtime main event on October 24 in Uncasville, Connecticut.

Both fighters were desperate to earn the win and propel themselves into a match with titleholder Errol Spence or other top contenders, including Shawn Porter and Danny Garcia.

The bout was a highly competitive clash of styles, with Lipinets playing the bull and Clayton's role that of the elusive matador. Lipinets endlessly marched forward while applying pressure and targeting the Canadian's body whenever he could. Meanwhile, Clayton, a 2012 Olympian, used constant movement to maneuver around the ring and counter Lipinets with well-timed punches.

In the end, one judge had it 115-113 in favor of Clayton while the other two scored it 114-114. Given how closely contested the bout was, a draw is a fair verdict. But I can't help but wonder what would have happened had Clayton asserted himself more by being the aggressor, as opposed to the fleet-footed counterpuncher. Clayton had success pushing Lipinets back, and had he done so with greater regularity, the Canadian might have been able to secure the win.

"It wasn't the outcome I expected, but I do believe I won that fight," Clayton told Global News. "I'm pretty sure everyone who's seen the fight believed that I won the fight. It does hurt, but at the same time, I mean, I'll get another shot. That's still going to be my goal, to try to bring the title back home."

Despite not getting the result he was looking for, Clayton performed well in his first fight outside of Canada against his most formidable opponent to date. Not to mention that he took the fight on short notice after Lipinets' original opponent, Kudratillo Abdukakhorov, had to withdraw because of visa issues.

Based on his solid showing, Clayton is deserving of another opportunity on a major network. And if he's given another chance, I have no doubt he will do everything in his power to not let the judges get in the way of his world championship dream.

Lipinets and Clayton battled on even terms over 12 rounds.

★★★★

Arthur Biyarslanov (7-0, 6 KOs) kept his undefeated record intact by quickly dispatching Juan Alvarez (28-10, 20 KOs) in the first round as part of the Devin Haney-Yuriorkis Gamboa undercard. Biyarslanov, whose alias is "The Chechen Wolf," used a few stinging lefts to the body from his southpaw stance to set up the finishing right hook that knocked Alvarez down and left him unable to continue. The win was Biyarslanov's fourth consecutive on a Matchroom Boxing undercard, as Eddie Hearn promotes him.

"I was just picking my shots and timing it. And like I said, if the knockout comes, I will take it, which I did," Biyarslanov told Chris Mannix in his post-fight interview. "As soon as I felt like I could land that left hand, I knew that I could throw the right hook and finish him. When I saw the way he landed, I knew it was done because he went face-first. I hope he's OK and that he recovers quickly. I really thank him for taking the fight, passing all the medicals and getting in the ring with me."

Biyarslanov turned pro in late 2018 after a very successful amateur career, which included a gold medal at the 2015 Pan American Games and competing for Canada at the 2016 Olympics. Even though he's immensely talented as a fighter, boxing wasn't his sport of choice growing up. He explained his background on a recent episode of the *Pugilistically Inclined* podcast:

"To be honest, I was forced into the sport by my brother. I was a soccer player and I was really good at it, and my brother was more into fighting sports like wrestling and boxing. When he would go to the gym, he would force me to go with him because he said I needed to get stronger. I never thought I'd choose boxing over soccer. But it got to the point where I started loving boxing so much that I left the sport that I started playing when I was 4 or 5 years old. So it was a very hard choice. But I'm very grateful to my brother, who introduced me to the sport, and I feel like I made the right decision.

"I had to choose between the two sports when things were getting more serious when I was around 16 years old. I won the youth nationals in boxing. At the same time, I had soccer tryouts with scouts coming

AMANDA WESTCOTT/SHOWTIME

from England, and they wanted me to try out for a team there. ... I took some time, spoke with my family, and I chose boxing because it's a one-man sport. When you're in the ring, you have no one to blame but yourself. If you didn't train hard enough, you have to answer for that in the ring. Whereas when you're on a soccer team, it doesn't matter how good you are; if you're not on a good team, you can't do much, because there are so many players. So I never wanted to leave it in the hands of anyone. I chose boxing and stuck with it."

Judging by his success thus far as a pro, Biyarslanov made the best decision of his young life.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

There was much to write about Japanese boxers in October.

Ring bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue finally made his Las Vegas debut on October 31 following a seven-month wait due to the ongoing pandemic.

It was not in a big arena or in front of the big audience that he'd been dreaming of, but Inoue (20-0, 17 KOs) still delivered a calm and composed performance against Australian challenger Jason Moloney (21-2, 18 KOs), dominating from start to finish, which came from a merciless short right hand at 2:59 in the seventh round.

Inoue, who retained his Ring, IBF and WBA titles, remained busy after the victory (streamed in the U.S. by ESPN+), appearing on Japanese TV programs, including live coverage by satellite channel WOWOW and a delayed-for-primetime broadcast by Fuji TV. He revealed in an interview that what he prepared for in training camp worked well in the ring.

"I've noticed that Moloney habitually throws double jabs and leans forward. So I figured out the timing on the second jab," he said.

The way Inoue moderated his pressure midway through the bout was also a part of his strategy. "I knew he was an 'all-rounder' with good skills, so I practiced waiting and making him [punch] to give me [counterpunch opportunities] if his defense was too tight to get through. Actually, his legs and upper body moved very well for his defense. But I used that plan so I could catch him."

Inoue stayed up and spoke live to the fans in Japan who were watching the Fuji TV broadcast at around 4 a.m. Las Vegas time: "I am sleepy-headed, guys, but I am so relieved and happy that I could win by KO in my first fight in Las Vegas. It was not easy [given the pandemic], but I got into top shape for the fight. That was the key to my performance." He looked delighted.

★★★★

A week before Inoue made a statement to kick off what he called "the new phase" of his career, another popular KO puncher, Daigo Higa (16-1-1, 16 KOs), returned to the ring on October 26 at Korakuen Hall, where the reduced number of seats for social distancing were sold out. However, the former WBC flyweight titleholder had to settle for a draw (96-94 and 95-95 twice) in a non-title 10-round bout with Seiya Tsutsumi (5-0-2, 4 KOs). It was the second fight for Higa since he came back in February 2020 from a two-year hiatus after he lost his belt on the scale in April 2018 the day before his first defeat to Cristofer Rosales. It was, in fact, his true restart, reuniting with his old coach Joji Nogi and joining a new stable, Ambition Gym. Fans expected Higa, rated No. 8 by the WBC at bantamweight, to overwhelm the inexperienced Tsutsumi, rated No. 13 by the Japan Boxing Commission (JBC). However, at the same time, everybody knew their history; they are friends, and Tsutsumi beat Higa twice in high school amateur bouts. Higa improved dramatically after turning pro at 18, capturing a world title three years later, before Tsutsumi entered the pro ranks. Higa should have shown that he is on a different level, but he allowed Tsutsumi to take the first round with constant combinations on the move. Both were cut from head clashes during the early rounds of the match. Higa's hard blows did not connect well and could not slow down Tsutsumi, who tried hard but lacked the physical tools to decisively surpass his old rival.

"I believed I was winning rounds, so I did not push myself that much," Higa said afterward. "I used to be a daredevil, but not anymore. I know people want to see me win by KO. I need to refine myself to live up to the expectation."

Fans are indeed missing Higa's old energetic and determined fighting spirit. It will take some time to see if this is the new version of Higa or if he is on the way to a true revival.

★★★★

It was shocking news when Ring Magazine/WBA junior flyweight champion Hiroto Kyoguchi and his chief trainer tested positive for COVID-19 just after the weigh-in for his third title defense against Thanongsak Simsri, the WBA's No. 10 contender from Thailand, which was scheduled for November 3 in Osaka. The entire JBC/Watanabe Promotion was canceled as a result.

Kyoguchi's short tweet "I am really sorry" shows how he was at a loss for words. This was to be the first male world championship fight in Japan with a fighter from a foreign country since the pandemic. A staff member of the promotion told The Ring that they are working on refunding tickets and doing their best to reschedule the fight with the Thai challenger.

Undefeated flyweight Junto Nakatani (21-0, 16 KOs) won the vacant WBO title with a one-sided performance against Giemel Magramo (24-2, 20 KOs), whom he stopped at 2:10 of the eighth round on November 6 at Korakuen Hall. Nakatani, a southpaw, boxed out of a crouch as the shorter Magramo aimed for his body. A solid straight left he landed late in the opening round gave Nakatani confidence.

"When I hit him, I saw his eyes in

a faint," said Nakatani, The Ring's No. 5-rated flyweight. "So I was able to focus on my strategy."

The Japanese fighter boxed well at long range, of course, but also did some good inside work with compact three- and four-punch combinations to the head and body that made the Filipino contender desperate. In the eighth round, Nakatani seized a moment with a left hook to the head and a barrage of accurate follow-up punches that sent Magramo to the canvas. As Magramo struggled to his feet, the referee counted 10.

"I knew I could finish in this round, as I saw him exhausted already in the seventh," Nakatani said. "I am happy with the well-executed combinations that I finished him with."

Nakatani, who earned the title that Kosei Tanaka vacated, was affected terribly by the pandemic. His first attempt at the world title was initially scheduled for April 4, then in August, and it finally came true in November but without longtime coach Rudy Hernandez, who could not have made the 14 days of mandatory quarantine even if he landed in Japan immediately after working the corner for Carlos Cuadras' rematch with Juan Francisco Estrada on October 23 in Mexico City.

Despite the unstable situation, Nakatani was able to get in perfect shape for the fight. Hernandez, who has trained him since he was 15 years old, told The Ring: "From the first day I met him seven years ago, I saw he was focused on being a champion of the world. It is a pleasure to work with such a young fighter who wants to be the very best. This time he did what we worked on in the gym and he was successful. He sacrificed a lot, and he accomplished a lot. I never doubted that he would be a world champion."

The new WBO titleholder is only 22 years old.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

The offers to turn pro came almost immediately when Eumir Marcial fell one fight short of qualifying for the Rio Olympics in 2016. And why wouldn't they? As a 165-pounder, he was the rare Filipino above the featherweight limit, with a deep amateur background and lights-out southpaw power.

Had he cashed in then, it's likely he'd already be a familiar name to American fans. It's also likely the childhood dream shared by him and his father, Eulalio, would have gone unfulfilled. From the time his father, a barangay (neighborhood) watchman in Lunzuran, Zamboanga City, had begun training Marcial at age 7, the two set their hearts on Olympic glory. To this day, the Philippines has yet to achieve a gold medal at the games, and Marcial wants to be the one to make history.

"My father, while he's still alive, I want to bring it to him like, 'Father, this is the gold medal of the Olympics. This is your hard work; this is our sacrifice when we are young,'" said the 25-year-old Marcial. After winning gold at this year's Asia-Oceania qualifier, Marcial accomplished step one of the goal, booking his ticket to the Tokyo Games.

Power and size make Eumir Marcial a popular attraction.

Everything was going to plan until the pandemic took over the world, postponing the games until 2021. That's when Marcial had a tough choice to make: Does he sit around his house in Cavite Province waiting for the world to normalize, or does he make a move to go pro?

But a lot has changed over the years, and having a pro record no longer means giving up your Olympic dream. Marcial signed a deal with MP Promotions, which is headed by Manny Pacquiao. MP Promotions President Sean Gibbons says Marcial is expected to have his pro debut in December.

The pandemic afforded the fighter an opportunity to work on his skills for another year. He arrived in Los Angeles in early October and has been working with Freddie Roach, as well as assistant trainer Marvin Somodio and conditioning coach Justin Fortune.

"Every day, I feel I'm improving," said Marcial. Back in the Philippines, there are no fighters near his size to spar with, unless his Fil-British light heavyweight teammate John Marvin is in town. On the day this columnist spoke with him, Marcial was sparring with 6-foot-2 cruiserweight Marco Deckmann (3-1, 3 KOs), who towered over the 5-foot-8 Marcial. Roach says he likes what he sees already.

"He's really, really heavy-handed; he punches hard. He's very quick with his hands," said Roach, who thinks Marcial could start at middleweight but eventually grow into the 168-pound division. Just don't expect the trainer to compare him to another Filipino southpaw who climbed up the scales.

"I think if you say he's the next Manny Pacquiao, that's maybe a jinx, because I don't think there's ever gonna be another Manny Pacquiao," said Roach. "This kid is a good fighter and he's a lot bigger ... We don't have a lot of Filipino boxers that big – that I've seen, at least."

If Marcial does win a middleweight title in the pros, he wouldn't be the first Filipino to do so. Ceferino Garcia, best remembered as the inventor of the bolo punch, won the middleweight championship in 1939 and held the great Henry Armstrong to a draw in 1940.

"I saw [Marcial] beating guys from Uzbekistan, this 'stan and that 'stan," said Gibbons. "It doesn't happen at 165 pounds if you're Filipino."

Marcial's amateur pedigree is indeed impressive. He won gold at the 2011 AIBA Youth World Boxing Championships, left knockout victims in his wake during a reign of terror at the 2015, 2017 and 2019 Southeast Asian Games and earned a silver at the 2019 World Championships. Roach says the fighter's style already lends itself well to the pros, but how fast he is moved is contingent upon what

happens in Tokyo.

After the 2017 SEA Games, Marcial told this writer he dreamed of fighting Gennadiy Golovkin. While fighting someone he considered his "idol" remains his goal, he knows he has a lot of work left to do before he gets his chance at the top pros.

"For now, I need to pass many boxers who dream [of fighting the top pros]. I need to beat them first to get there," said Marcial.

★★★★

Filipino vs. Filipino world title fights are exceedingly rare, but Pedro Taduran is likely to face his second compatriot in three fights. The IBF strawweight titleholder will make his second title defense against mandatory challenger Rene Mark Cuarto. All that's missing is a date and venue. "Whenever the coronavirus lets up enough that we can promote the fight," said Gibbons, who adds that the fight is already approved by the IBF.

Taduran (14-2-1, 11 KOs) won the title in September 2019, stopping countryman Samuel Salva after four rounds to win the vacant belt. After that, he retained the title in Mexico with a technical draw against Daniel Valladares in February.

"What I know of Cuarto is that he is tough and strong," said Taduran. "But from what I see, I can handle him."

★★★★

Giemel Magramo finally got his opportunity at a world title but fell short, losing by eighth-round knockout to Junto Nakatani on November 6 at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo, Japan. The vacant WBO flyweight title was at stake, and the larger Nakatani controlled the bout from the outset. A left uppercut-hook combination put Magramo down and ended the fight, which had been postponed and rescheduled a handful of times due to the pandemic. Upon arrival in Tokyo, Magramo had to quarantine for two weeks and trained out of his hotel room up until fight week.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

When the 4@War junior middleweight tournament started in November 2019, Brandon Thysse was never supposed to go all the way, most people favoring either former MMA star Boyd Allen or Roarke Knapp to walk away with the winner's check. He already had two losses, one of them to Allen, and was expected to once again come up just short of victory. Someone forgot to tell Thysse, though. The fighter now known as "Fast Guns" stopped Knapp, and then, after an extended break due to the pandemic, returned in October to stop Allen in the third round with a left hook from hell to win the final.

Trained by Damien Durandt, son of legendary South African trainer Nick Durandt, Thysse shares a stable with WBC cruiserweight titleholder Ilunga Makabu as well as another top 154-pound prospect, Emmany Kalombo. Some of the gold has clearly rubbed off, Thysse having steadily improved since joining the Durandt camp.

Thysse, now 13-2-1 with 11 knockouts, is the son of former South African and Commonwealth 168-pound champion Andre Thysse and looks set to carve his own niche in the sport.

★★★★

Welterweight Thulani Mbenge got himself back in the win column after suffering his first defeat to Sebastian Formella in July 2019, outpointing Kuvesa Katembo over 10 rounds. Katembo tried hard but did not have the firepower to trouble Mbenge, who landed all the telling blows. Still, there was a lot of ring rust evident, as could be expected after such a long layoff.

Mbenge, who holds wins over the likes of Diego Chaves and Miguel Vazquez, is undoubtedly talented and will hopefully regain his career momentum.

★★★★

On the topic of welterweights, hot 10-0 prospect Jabulani Makhense, moving up from 140, made a statement by demolishing the usually durable Eric Kapia in a single round. The only other man to stop the 22-4-2 Kapia was Mbenge, who turned the trick in four rounds back in 2016. Makhense put Kapia on the canvas three times before the fight was waved over.

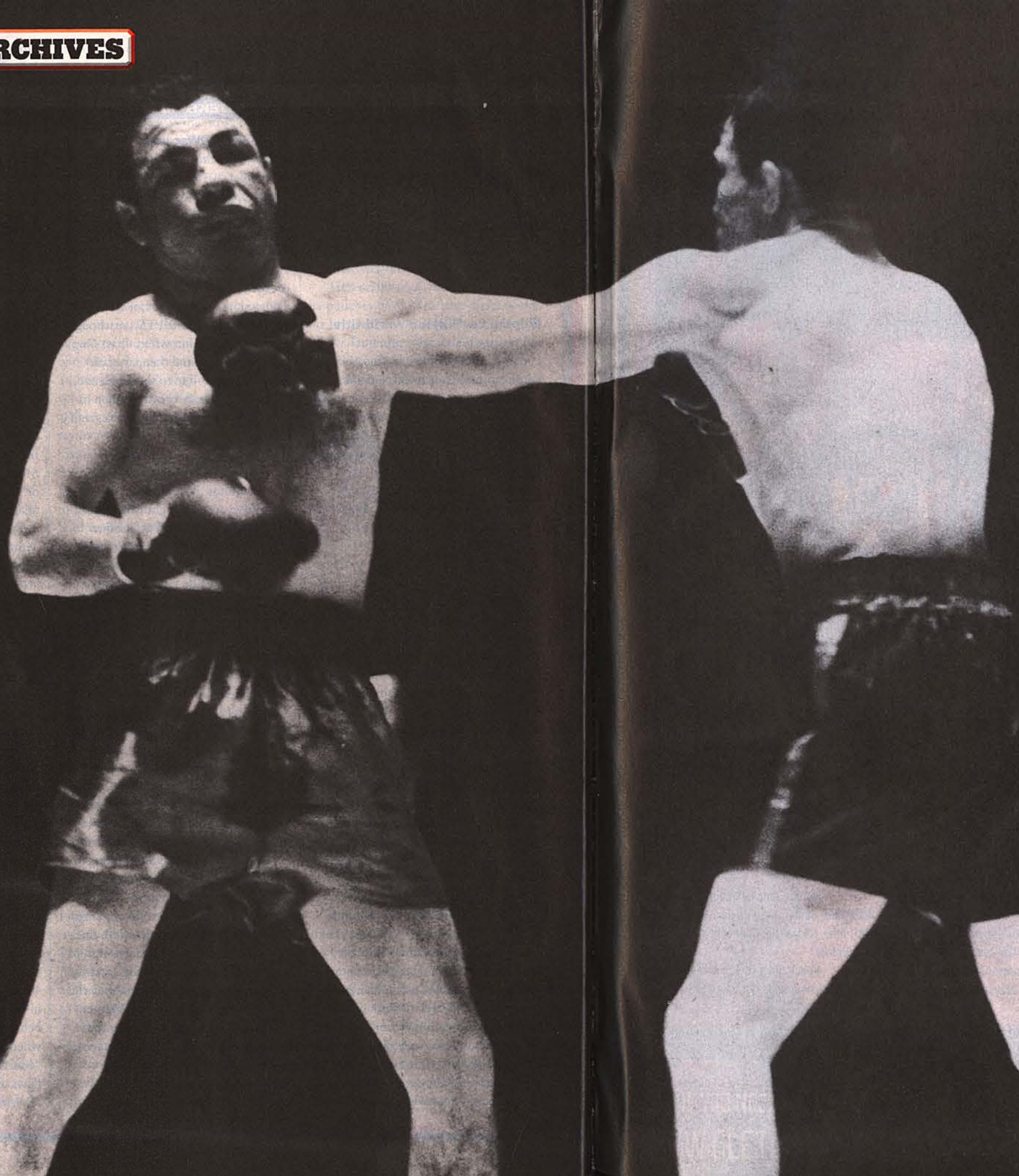
Makhense will take on another Mbenge opponent, Kuvesa Katembo, in December, and if he can improve on Mbenge's performance, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Makhense and Mbenge could end up facing each other in a big local showdown.

★★★★

South Africa's only world titlist, IBF flyweight beltholder Moruti Mthalane, will make the fourth defense of his second reign at home when he takes on the Philippines' Jayson Mama in Durban on December 20. When Mthalane steps into the ring, it will be just a few days short of a year since his last outing, when he stopped former three-weight titleholder Akira Yaegashi in nine rounds in Yokohama, Japan.

Mama (15-0, 8 KOs), the IBF's top-rated contender, is worlds apart from Mthalane in terms of experience and quality of opposition, but these are strange times and we have seen upsets galore.

The 38-year-old Mthalane shows no signs of slowing down but would dearly like to cash in with something big. A unification fight with WBC titleholder Julio Cesar Martinez is an opportunity Team Mthalane would welcome. With Kosei Tanaka moving up to junior bantamweight, a Mthalane-Martinez clash could conceivably be for the Ring championship. It is a possibility that is not lost on trainer/manager Colin Nathan, who also has former Ring 108-pound champion Hekkie Budler in his stable. "We want a second Ring belt," Nathan states emphatically when questioned about the possibility. "Martinez is dangerous, but he has flaws and Moruti is just as dangerous for Martinez."



BEST OF THE BEST

When the legendary Barney Ross relinquished the undisputed lightweight crown in 1935, two future Hall of Famers faced off for the vacant title. Former champ Tony Canzoneri (left) decked Lou Ambers three times en route to a deserved 15-round unanimous decision triumph at Madison Square Garden on May 10 of that same year. Ambers would avenge the loss twice, and both men are listed among the finest 135-pounders of all time. RING

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COMING UP

Unified heavyweight titleholder Anthony Joshua returns on December 12 against Kubrat Pulev.

DECEMBER

DEC. 12 – Anthony Joshua vs. Kubrat Pulev, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), London (DAZN). Also, Lawrence Okolie vs. Krzysztof Glowacki, cruiserweights.

DEC. 12 – Joseph Parker vs. Junior Fa, heavyweights, Auckland, New Zealand (DAZN).

DEC. 19 – Callum Smith vs. Canelo Alvarez, super middleweights (for Smith's Ring/WBA titles), Texas (DAZN).

DEC. 19 – Nonito Donaire vs. Emmanuel Rodriguez, bantamweights (for vacant WBC title), Uncasville, Connecticut (Showtime).

DEC. 31 – Kazuto Ioka vs. Kosei Tanaka, junior bantamweights (for Ioka's WBO title), Tokyo.

JANUARY

JAN. 30 – (date not finalized at press time) Alexander Povetkin vs. Dillian Whyte 2, heavyweights, London (DAZN).

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